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THE GREY MONK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE."

CHAPTER IX.

ETHEL AND TAMSIN.

WHEN Ethel had read Matthew Thursby's letter to the last word she quietly refolded the paper and laid it on the table. The sisters were watching her every movement intently. She wished they would speak—that they would say something—anything. But it seemed as if they were waiting for her to break the silence. Her eyes turned from one to the other. In their faces she read nothing save love and compassion. Then, with a sob in her throat, she spoke.

"And I—the child of a stranger—a nobody's child, owe everything to you! But for you I might have starved, or found my only home in the workhouse! Oh! how can I ever love you half enough? But now I have learnt this, I feel that I have no longer a right to call this place my home. I must go out into the world and earn my living. I must strive to——"

"Ethel!" exclaimed an austere voice, that of Miss Matilda. There was an inflection in it which the girl had not heard for years—not since some juvenile peccadillo had momentarily excited the spinster's ire. "Nothing which has occurred this morning justifies you in adopting such a tone towards my sister and myself. You seem to forget that what comes as news to you has been known to us from the first. Why, then, should you assume that the mere fact of your having learnt certain things to-day for the first time should have the effect of abrogating arrangements which have been in existence for a longer period than you can remember?" Miss Matilda's style in her more didactic moments was unconsciously modelled to some extent on that of her favourite authors, the English essayists of the eighteenth century.

"Forgive me for speaking as I did," pleaded Ethel, with eyes that were blinded with tears. "But, indeed, I am so overcome by what

you have told me, and what I have just read, that I know not either what to say or what to do."

"There is nothing for you to do—nothing whatever," said Miss Matilda, still with a touch of peremptoriness.

"And perhaps, my dear, if you were to say as little as possible just now, it might be as well," interposed Miss Jane for the first time. Then turning to her sister, she added: "The poor child needs a little time to recover herself."

"There I agree with you, and I think the best thing she can do is to go and lie down for an hour." Then to Ethel, with a sudden softening of the voice, she said: "Child, child, cannot you understand that, despite all you have learnt to-day, nothing is to be changed—that you are still to be our niece, and we are still to be your aunts, and that everything is to go on precisely as before? Vale View will continue to be your home, as it has been for as long as you can remember, and you must never again hint at such a thing as going out into the world to earn your living, unless you wish your aunts to believe that you have ceased to care for them."

"And," added Miss Jane, with one of her sweetest smiles, "that you are tired of living under the same roof with two humdrum old women."

What reply Ethel would have made will never be known, because at this juncture there came a tap at the door, which was followed by the appearance of Charlotte, the parlour-maid, carrying a salver with a card on it. "If you please, ma'am," said the girl, "I've shown the lady into the morning-room."

"Tell Mrs. Lucas Dexter that I and my sister will be with her almost immediately," answered Miss Matilda, after a glance at the card.

As the girl left the room by one door, Ethel stole softly out by another.

The sisters looked at each other. It was a look which said, as plainly as words could have done, "How very fortunate that we happen to be wearing our puce lutestrings and our best caps this afternoon!"

The Hon. Mrs. Lucas Dexter was one of the great ladies of the neighbourhood, and had never condescended to call at Vale View but twice before, on both of which occasions she had contrived to extract a small cheque from the sisters. Indeed, it was a peculiarity of hers never to call upon anyone who was not quite in her own set, or whose position in the social scale, which in small provincial centres is marked by so many gradations, was admittedly below her own, without making them pay for the privilege in the shape of a subscription to one or other of the benevolent schemes in which she professed to be interested. Those among the small gentry of St. Oswyth's, and such of the professional people as were tolerably well-to-do, would have been pleased to have the Hon. Mrs. Lucas Dexter call upon them

twice as often as she did, and would have looked upon the two or three guineas of which each of her visits depleted them as money well laid out, in so far as it had been the means of securing her presence for a quarter of an hour in their drawing-rooms. But there were others, to whom every guinea was an object, who would have been glad if she had passed them by altogether, and who groaned in spirit, while smiling a sickly smile, when the inevitable tablets and pencil were produced, and Mrs. Dexter, fixing her victim through her *pince-nez*, said, with that stand-and-deliver air which few people were found bold enough to resist: "And pray, what sum shall I have the pleasure of putting down opposite *your* name?"

Although Miss Matilda had advised Ethel to go and lie down awhile, the latter had no inclination for anything of the sort. Instead, she went in search of Tamsin, and found her in her own room, an apartment situated between the dressing-rooms of the sisters, and having a door which opened into each of them. Tamsin had been on board the *Pandora*, when Ethel's supposed mother had lost her life, and had a knowledge of all the events connected with that far-off time. Ethel could talk to her and question her, as she could not talk to or question her "aunts," and there were half-a-score things she was burning to hear about.

Tamsin was sitting in her favourite spot, on the broad, low, cushioned window-seat of her room. She was crooning to herself one of the quaint hymns she had learnt at her mother's knee half a century before. She had a short, rather dumpy figure, and very homely features. Her eyes were at once shrewd and good-humoured, and she had a very pleasant smile. Her still plentiful grey hair was crowned by a plain net cap, with goffered frills, bound over the crown of the head with a broad black ribbon. In age she was some three or four years older than her mistresses, whose service she had entered soon after they left school, and with whom she had remained ever since. Tamsin was famed for her skill as a needlewoman, and this afternoon she was engaged on some fine sewing, which it was her pride to be still able to see to do without the aid of spectacles.

Ethel burst into the room, and before Tamsin knew what had happened, she found herself being violently hugged.

"I know all!" exclaimed the girl. Next moment she corrected herself. "No, not quite all, but much—a great deal. I have just been reading Uncle Matthew's letter, written a little while before he died, with directions that it should be opened by me on my nineteenth birthday. And to think that you—you dear, but artful old thing—have known all these years everything there is in the letter, and yet have never breathed the least hint that I was somebody altogether different from the Ethel Thursby I have always believed myself to be!"

"The secret was not mine, dearie," replied Tamsin, as she pulled her cap into shape. "What would my mistresses have thought, if, by as much as a single word, I had betrayed their trust in me? No, no,

it was far better for you in every way, that you should be told nothing about these things till you were grown up. You would only have kept on bothering your child's brain to no good purpose."

"But, oh! Tamsin, to think that my aunts are not my aunts, and that I have no more right to bear their name than the veriest beggar that walks the streets!" There was that in her voice which told the elder woman that her tears were very close to the surface.

"Listen, honey," said Tamsin, as she stroked the girl's brown hair fondly. And thereupon, only in different words, and homelier phraseology, she proceeded to state the case to almost the same effect that it had been stated by Miss Matilda already. The mere fact that a certain piece of information, hitherto, for wise reasons, kept from her, had been told her to-day, did not and could not in the remotest degree affect the relations which had existed for so long a time between herself and her supposed aunts. They had chosen to adopt her as their niece when she was an infant, and such she would continue to be to them so long as it should please Providence to leave unsevered the thread of their earthly existence. She, Ethel, must strive to forget that Miss Matilda and Miss Jane were not her aunts in reality, and must continue to regard them in precisely the same light that she had always done.

Ethel sat awhile in silence after Tamsin had finished speaking. Then she said: "Just now it all seems so strange and incredible to me, that I find it almost as hard to believe as I should one of the fairy tales I used to read when a girl. In time, no doubt, I shall get used to it, so that it will seem as if I must have known of it all along; but that will not be to-day, nor to-morrow." A sigh broke from her. She sat staring out of the window without seeing anything of that which her eyes rested upon.

Presently she resumed: "But now that I have been told so much, I want to know more. There are several questions, Tamsin, which I do not care to ask my aunts, but which I don't in the least mind asking you."

Tamsin screwed up her mouth, but said nothing. It altogether depended on the nature of the girl's questions whether they would be answered by her or no.

"First of all," resumed Ethel, "Uncle Matthew, in his letter, states it as his belief that the—the person who passed me off on board ship as being her child was not in reality my mother, but he omits to give any reason for such a belief. You were there. Can you tell me what his reasons were, or what was your own belief in the matter?"

Tamsin's needle stopped in the middle of a stitch. She did not reply at once, but seemed to be considering within herself in what terms she should answer the question.

"My belief was the same as Mr. Matthew's," at length she replied. "Mrs. Vane had not been two days on board before I said to myself, 'It's very strange to me if that woman is that child's mother.'

It was not merely that she didn't seem to care about you, and was never so pleased as when you were out of her sight, but from a score of different things, each a trifle in itself, that I so judged her."

"Was she—was she a lady?"

Tamsin shook her head. "She was not what *I* should call a lady, and I think I know a real lady when I see one as well as most people. She was not at all bad-looking, but as full of vanity as a peacock. Even at breakfast-time she always appeared in a silk or satin gown, with a lot of jewellery about her, which is not what ladies are in the habit of doing. Then, she used to make little slips in her talk, so that one could form a pretty good guess that her bringing up had been nothing particular. Her greatest delight was to flirt and carry on with the unmarried gentlemen on board, who used to encourage her in every way they could think of, just to make fun of her afterwards among themselves. But, with all her faults, hers was a dreadful fate—poor thing! To be laughing and giggling one minute, and playing off, as she supposed, one admirer against another, and the next to be overboard in the great black waste of waters! One wild despairing shriek came borne to our ears, and then all was silence. Oh, it was terrible!"

There was a long pause, and then Tamsin said: "I suppose, dearie, that Mr. Matthew in his letter told you about a certain person coming to the ship and inquiring for his sister, and of his recognising her in a photograph of Mrs. Vane which was shown him?"

Ethel nodded assent.

"And you would also be told how the man in question stated that his sister had gone out as lady's-maid only a little while before, that she was unmarried, and that it was impossible you should be her child?"

"Uncle Matthew's letter told me all that."

"Then, do you think, yourself, that any further evidence is needed to prove that, whoever else's daughter you may be, you are not the child of the woman who called herself Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane?"

"I suppose it must be as you say," replied Ethel. "So that the mystery of my birth remains as much a mystery as ever, and, after all these years, there is very little likelihood of its ever being solved."

"And if it has been kept from you, you may rely upon it that it has been for the best. How can you tell from what unhappiness, from what unknown dangers, you may have been saved? Instead of encouraging vain dreams about a past which is locked up from you, try to reckon up by how many blessings you are surrounded. Think what a happy girl you are, or ought to be, in comparison with what you might have been, and——"

"Oh, you dear old Tamsin, don't for one moment get it into your head that I am anything but grateful and thankful from the bottom of my heart for—for—oh, for everything!"

She had flung her arms round Tamsin's neck, and she now cried softly on her shoulder for a minute or two.

Presently she looked up with an April smile. "What a weak, foolish girl you must think me," she said. "But I have shed my last tear now for ever so long to come. I feel as if there's not another left for anybody. So, now tell me this: If nobody knows whose child I am, nor where I came from, how is it known that to-day is my nineteenth birthday?"

"That is very easily answered. It was on the 14th of November that Mrs. Vane brought you on board the *Pandora*. She told more than one person that you were just six months old, so that, if she spoke the truth, you were born sometime about the 14th of May in the same year, and that was the date which Mr. Matthew afterwards decided should be kept as your birthday."

"So that, besides so many other things, I owe my birthdays to Uncle Matthew. And what happy days they have always been! How I wish he had lived to see the child grow up on whose head he showered so many kindnesses! And now, Tamsin, the next thing I want to know is, who it was that gave me the name of Ethel."

"It was the name Mrs. Vane called you by, so, of course, there was no thought of changing it later on; but whether it was your real name, or only one the poor woman had taken a fancy to call you by, she alone could have told us. But see, there goes Mrs. Lucas Dexter's carriage! You had better run away now, honey. The bell will be almost sure to ring for me in a minute or two."

It is still the same day. The early dinner is over, and Ethel is again strolling by herself in the grounds. She feels that she wants to be alone. As yet, she can scarcely realise the news her birthday has brought her. As yet, it all seems so strange and incomprehensible. It is as if an earthquake had shaken the foundations of her life, leaving nothing stable or steadfast around her. Her aunts have said that everything is to go on as before, that not a word is to be said to any one. But one exception there must be—she must tell her lover—she must have no secrets from him. Perhaps, when he learns that she is a waif, a child of unknown parentage, and without a home other than that which charity has afforded her, he will—But no; not even in her inmost thoughts will she so far wrong him as to deem him capable of that.

There is a hillock in the grounds, from the summit of which, a stretch of high road leading to the town is visible. More than once she climbs it to look out for her lover. At length she discerns him in the distance and her heart begins to flutter like a frightened bird in its cage. Presently she takes out her handkerchief, and waves it as a signal to him. He sees it and waves his hat in return. Then she runs down the hillock, and so times herself that at the moment he opens the side door, which admits people on foot to the grounds of Vale View, she is there to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

LAUNCE KEYMER.

LAUNCE KEYMER was a good-looking young fellow, with an insinuating manner and a plausible tongue. Being possessed of so many advantages, it was scarcely to be wondered at that he was extremely popular among the marriageable young ladies of St. Oswyth's and its neighbourhood. He was the son of a local brewer, and assisted his father in the business. He had been spoiled and indulged while young, and, as an only son, had been allowed a free rein in his extravagances. But, with a second family growing up, and an expensive wife half his own age, the elder Keymer found it a difficult matter now-a-days to meet Launce's frequent demands on his purse. In short, the only thing left for the latter to do—and it was a point as to which both father and son were in thorough accord—was to marry a girl with money.

Now, it so happened that Keymer *père* had a cousin, who was a clerk in the office of Mr. Linaway, the chief lawyer in St. Oswyth's—a man with a large family and a very limited income, whom the brewer had more than once been able to help, at little or no cost to himself. This cousin, Tuttle by name, not ungrateful for past favours, and with an eye, perhaps, to any which the future might have in store for him, and having some reason to believe that Launce was looking out for a wife with a fortune, determined to do the brewer what he termed “a good turn,” in confiding to him a certain professional secret which he had learnt by accident, and of which he was supposed to be wholly ignorant.

“The very man I've been wanting to see for the last week or more,” said Tuttle to the elder Keymer, next time they met. “Rather a curious thing happened to me about ten days ago, which I want to tell you about. I'll turn and walk part of the way with you, if you don't mind. Well, you must know that one forenoon I had occasion to visit the strong room which opens out of the governor's private office, in order to obtain some title-deeds which were wanted, but which I was not at once able to find, owing to their having been misplaced. While thus engaged, the governor rang his bell for Mr. Dix, the managing clerk. I suppose the old boy, who is beginning to break up, and whose memory fails him strangely at times, had quite forgotten that I was there within hearing. But be that as it may, he proceeded to give Dix instructions for the drawing up of a couple of wills, the particulars of which he was to keep strictly to himself. The wills in question were those of the two Miss Thursbys of Vale View House. The governor talks in a low voice, and mumbles a good deal, so that I was not able to catch all he said; but I picked up enough to satisfy myself that, with the exception of a few hundreds, to be distributed amongst various charities, an

annuity to an old servant, and a few minor legacies, the whole of the property of both sisters is bequeathed to the young lady known as Miss Ethel Thursby—their niece, I believe she is. Of course, I can only make a rough guess as to the value of the property in question, which seems to consist chiefly of securities of various kinds; but there's no doubt in my mind that, if realised, it would mount up to a respectable number of thousands. That being the case, Cousin Bob, it might be worth your boy's while to make up to the heiress, who is, I believe, a very pretty girl into the bargain. But not a word to a soul of what I've just told you, unless you want me to lose my berth and be ruined for life."

The hint thus afforded was too precious not to be followed up and acted upon.

Launce Keymer had already been introduced to Ethel, he having met her on two or three occasions at garden parties and other gatherings of young people. He had admired her for the time being, as he admired every pretty girl he met, and had thought no more about her. Truth to tell, Ethel was not the kind of girl to attract more than a passing glance of admiration from the brewer's son. She was too quietly dignified and "stand-offish"; she was lacking in dash and "go"; she was one of those girls whom he felt instinctively it would be unwise to talk slang to; there was something about her which, when in her company, compelled him to be upon his best behaviour; he never felt quite what he termed "at home" with her; as a consequence of which, while always smilingly polite to her, he had rather shunned than sought her society.

When the brewer had told his son that he must either change his mode of life, or marry a girl with money, the latter had pertinently asked: "Where am I to find her?" That there was an overplus of marriageable young women at St. Oswyth's, as there is in all small provincial towns, was a melancholy fact which could not be gainsaid, nor that many of them were nice girls, carefully brought up, well educated, and in every way fitted to make a reasonable man happy; but, alas! they were one and all comparatively poor. Several of them had small dowries, and would inherit something considerable at the death of their parents; but 'tis ill waiting for dead men's shoes, and Launce Keymer's needs were those of the immediate future. Meantime, while waiting for the coming heiress, he flirted to his heart's content, but, so far as was known, contrived to steer clear of any serious entanglement.

And now, lo and behold! the heiress was here—had been here, at his elbow all the time, without his having had the least suspicion of the fact.

No long time was allowed to elapse after the interview between Mr. Keymer and his cousin before Launce began to seize every opportunity that came in his way to pay assiduous court to the heiress of Vale View. There was a good deal of quiet gaiety in St. Oswyth's that

winter and spring, and they met on a number of occasions. It is not needful that we should linger over what came to pass. Launce, with a cleverness which, in a better cause, would have done him credit, did his best to adapt himself to what he called Ethel's "Quaker-like ways," toning himself down, so to speak, when in her presence, content to feel his way gradually, and not to startle her by too premature a declaration of his love, or what he wished her to regard as such. As already stated, he was both handsome and plausible. Ethel had never had such attentions paid her by any one else, and, almost before she knew what had befallen her, her heart had capitulated. When he had, as he conceived, sufficiently paved the way, Launce seized an opportunity to press his suit with well-simulated ardour, and succeeded in winning from the shrinking girl a half-reluctant consent, which, as soon as the glamour of his presence was removed, sent her to her chamber, there to shed tears which had in them a sting of poignant regret.

But she had passed her word, and she was too loyal to attempt to recall it. As the days went on, she strove to persuade herself that she had not made a mistake, but that she really did love Launce, and it may be that she gradually succeeded in hoodwinking herself into such a belief. Yet at times there was a strange aching void in her heart which puzzled and frightened her. She had always understood that when people were in love it was for them a season of unalloyed happiness; but she, alas! was far from happy.

And then there was that hateful promise which Launce had extracted from her, not to speak of their engagement to any one till he should give her leave to do so. It was only for a few weeks, he told her, probably a month at the most, that he asked her to keep unbroken silence. Private reasons of an imperative nature compelled him to ask this favour at her hands. She had yielded to his importunity, but none the less did she realise how disloyal it was on her part to have a secret—and such a secret—locked up from her aunts.

The fact was that Launce Keymer, unknown to his father, or any one at St. Oswyth's, had for some time past been making love to a pretty nursery governess at Dulminster, the county town, a dozen miles away, to which place he ran over by train on a couple of evenings in each week. Furthermore, he had been infatuated enough—and he now reviled himself in bitter terms for his folly—to write her a number of compromising letters, such as if produced in an action for breach of promise would infallibly land him in heavy damages. He knew that Hetty Blair had more than one correspondent in St. Oswyth's, and that, if the news of his engagement with Ethel Thursby were once made public, it could scarcely fail to reach her ears. Not that he would have minded that in the least, if Hetty had only burnt or otherwise destroyed those fatal letters. But, as he was well aware, she had done nothing of the kind. He had seen them with his own eyes, tied round with white ribbon, where they lay in the girl's

old-fashioned work-box which stood on the top of the bureau in her mother's little parlour, and his object was to get them back into his own hands before his engagement to Ethel got noised abroad. That once accomplished, he felt that he could afford to snap his fingers at Miss Hetty Blair.

It may seem strange that such a cool, calculating, mercenary fellow as Launce Keymer should so far have run counter to all the principles by which it was his ambition to regulate his life as to permit himself to fall in love with a young person who was compelled to work for her daily bread. But it was just one of those things which occasionally come to pass, as if to upset all one's preconceived notions of what we poor mortals think ought to happen, and to prove by what contradictory impulses hearts the most calculating and unemotional are sometimes swayed, as by a force they are powerless to resist.

Hetty Blair was a pretty brunette, with sparkling black eyes, full ripe lips, and a vivacious, not to say saucy, manner. She was genuinely in love with Keymer, and jealously miserable, although she strove to hide the fact from her lover, because for five evenings out of seven she saw nothing of him, and had no assurance that he was not making love to some one else at St. Oswyth's—which was precisely what he was doing.

Miss Blair, who at this time was filling the post of day-governess to the two young children of a major on half-pay, had her home with her mother in a little cottage in a suburb of Dulminster. Keymer was in the habit of visiting Hetty twice a week, on Wednesdays, when the girl's pupils were allowed a half-holiday, and on Saturdays, when business with the young brewer was over at an early hour; consequently, when he made an unexpected appearance at the cottage on a certain Thursday afternoon, when he was fully aware that Hetty was from home, Mrs. Blair could not refrain from expressing her surprise. His explanation was, that having to come to Dulminster on business for his father, he could not resist the temptation of arranging a little surprise for Hetty. Accordingly, he had brought her a bouquet of hot-house flowers, and one of those delicious Madeira cakes of which she was so fond, and if Mrs. Blair would so far oblige him as to step upstairs, where she kept her little cellaret, and bring down one of those half dozen of choice bottles of port he had once sent her, he should feel that his little surprise was complete.

Mrs. Blair did not object in the least. She had a weakness for port, as Launce, who was a great favourite with her, was quite aware. Accordingly she trotted slowly upstairs, for she was somewhat infirm, leaving Keymer alone, smoking his cigar in the little parlour, and he was still occupied in the same harmless fashion when she returned, ten minutes later. But in the interim he had contrived either to pick or force the lock of Hetty's work-box and obtain possession of his letters. Presently he took his leave. His father, he explained, would

expect him back by six o'clock at the latest ; but of course he should see Hetty as usual on Saturday.

It was on the day prior to Ethel Thursby's birthday that Launce Keymer regained possession of his letters.

CHAPTER XI.

HOPES AND FEARS.

LAUNCE KEYMER was radiant as he opened the side door which admitted him to the grounds of Vale View. He had got back those compromising letters, which had been the bugbear of his life ever since he had won Ethel's promise to become his wife. Hetty Blair might rave and storm to her heart's content, as no doubt she would do, for she was a girl with a temper of her own, but it was no longer in her power to harm him, and beyond that he cared not at all. There was nothing now to hinder him from pressing forward his suit with Ethel, and it should be owing to no lukewarmness on his part if they were not married before the end of summer. Of course he was quite aware that the wills which the spinsters had caused to be drawn up in favour of their niece made no provision for her in the event of her marriage, and would only benefit her after the demise of one or both of them. But he had seen and heard enough of the Miss Thursbys to imbue him with a feeling of all but absolute certainty that they would not fail, on her marriage, to liberally dower the girl who was destined ultimately to succeed to the whole of their property—always provided that she married in accordance with their wishes, and he had far too good an opinion of himself to fear that his suit would meet with any discouragement at their hands. In any case, the risk of his wedding a dowerless wife was one which, in Ethel's case, Keymer was fully prepared to face ; indeed, to him it seemed an almost infinitesimal one.

Master Launce gave a well-feigned start of joyful surprise when, on opening the green door, he found Ethel waiting for him just inside it, although he had quite expected to find her there. An instant later she was imprisoned in his arms, while half-a-dozen passionate kisses were imprinted in quick succession on her flaming face. One cool kiss on a coyly proffered cheek was the utmost she had ever conceded her lover before. Never had he ventured to put his arms around her till to-day. When he released her she stood panting and indignant, and half inclined to cry. But Launce only looked at her with laughing eyes.

"I could not have helped it, darling, had it been to save my life," he said. "For one thing, it is your birthday, and surely on such an occasion a lover's kisses are the sweetest congratulations he can offer. And then, again, I am the bearer of good news. The need no longer exists for keeping our engagement a secret. I am here this afternoon

to seek an interview with your aunts, and I trust that by the time we are a couple of days older all the world of St. Oswyth's will know that you and I are betrothed."

Ethel did not reply; she had not yet recovered her equanimity. They had turned, and were now sauntering slowly across the lawn. Launce's promise to at once seek an interview with her aunts had served to lift a weight off her heart, and yet she was conscious of a certain shrinking, not untinged with regret, now that the time had come when the secret of her engagement would be a secret no longer. It seemed to her as if the act of telling her aunts would serve to bind her irrevocably to a promise which till now she had felt in some vague sort of way she could have broken had she willed to do so. Now, however, that power would be lost to her for ever. For better for worse, she had accepted this man for her life partner, and she must abide by the result. She told herself that she ought to be very, very glad, and yet, somehow, there was no glow of gladness at her heart.

"I am given to understand," resumed Launce presently, "that nowadays young ladies are in the habit of looking for something on their birthdays much more substantial than mere kisses and good wishes. So, as I have no desire to be behind other people in such matters, I venture to offer this little trinket for your acceptance, in the hope that it may sometimes serve to remind you of the giver."

While speaking he had drawn from his pocket a pretty bracelet of novel design, having on it the letter 'E' formed with small diamonds and emeralds. Mr. Keymer senior had groaned in spirit while drawing the cheque to pay for it, but, for all that, he looked upon it as money well laid out. Taking Ethel's left hand in his, Launce proceeded to fix the bracelet round her wrist. Then raising his hat for a moment, he touched her fingers with his lips as respectfully as if she had been a princess. It was an effect which had been duly planned beforehand, as had also the apparently spontaneous embrace on which he had audaciously ventured at the moment of seeing her.

"It is exceedingly pretty, and you are very kind," murmured Ethel, as she let her eyes dwell for a moment on his. But, for all that, she felt as if the bracelet were a manacle.

"And now," resumed Launce, "the sooner I get over my formidable interview with your aunts, the better it will be for all concerned."

His words served like a shock to bring back to Ethel's mind all that had happened to her since the morning, which the events of the last few minutes had served temporarily to banish, and to remind her of the painful duty she had still to perform. There was no way of escape. To have married Launce without having first made known to him as much of the story of her early life as was known to herself,

would have been disloyal both to herself and him, and that was a possibility which did not find a moment's lodgment in her thoughts. All the same, the task she had set herself was none the less a hard one to fulfil.

But there was no time for hesitation. Already Launce had come to a halt. In another moment he would have turned and bent his steps towards the house. She laid a detaining hand on his sleeve. "Before you see my aunts," she said in a slightly tremulous voice, "I have something of much importance to reveal to you—something of which I myself had no knowledge till this morning."

He turned on her a quick startled look. There was something in the way she had spoken which convinced him that it was no ordinary young lady's secret—such as the confession of some prior girlish romance—that was about to be told him. It was quite out of the question that this pure-eyed, candid-browed, fair young creature could have anything to reveal which could in any way affect his suit for her hand. It might be that her conscience—and that she had a very tender conscience he did not doubt—troubled her about some trivial sin of omission, or commission, as to which she felt that she must take him into her confidence, but at which he, a man, could well afford to smile, and never give to it as much as a second thought.

The look of startled surprise merged into one of his brightest smiles. He pressed her hand as if to give her confidence. "Whatever may be the nature of what you have to tell me," he said, "you are at least assured beforehand of my sympathy, should you deem it worthy of acceptance."

She cast on him a grateful look. "Here is my favourite walk," she said. "Let us turn into it. It is the most secluded spot in the grounds, and, as a rule, the gardener and I have it all to ourselves."

It seemed as if she were pitifully desirous of delaying her revelation till the last possible moment. Now, however, she drew in her breath and took the plunge which could no longer be avoided. In brief but clear terms she proceeded to narrate to her astonished listener the details of that romantic episode of which she had been the baby heroine. She told him all as it had been told to her; she kept nothing back. Keymer listened with growing uneasiness. He had drawn one of her hands within his arm, and, as they strolled along, turning and retracing their steps from one end of the walk to the other, he pressed it gently to his side from time to time, as if to assure her that the sympathy he had promised her was hers in fullest measure.

There was a little space of silence after she had come to an end. He was turning over in his mind all that she had just told him, piecing together the different facts, and making of the narrative a connected whole. Had he formulated aloud the conclusion he presently arrived at, he would have stated it thus: "The old maids have all along been aware that the girl was no relative of theirs, and yet, with this knowledge clearly in their minds, they have chosen to

make her their heiress; consequently, the simple fact of their having told her about certain things, which had previously been kept from her of set purpose, will in no way serve to alter the disposition of their property. She will still remain their heiress, and the world at large will not know otherwise than that she is their niece. Nothing will be changed."

Launce's brain worked nimbly on occasions of emergency, and the silence had not lasted more than half a minute before he flashed on Ethel one of his most seductive smiles. "Darling," he said, in tones the tenderest at his command, "what you have now told me will only serve, if that be possible, to make you dearer to me than you were before. I assure you that I appreciate to the full the confidence thus placed in me. It proves what you may perhaps think stood in no need of proof—that you have a genuine regard for me, and unless that warmer sentiment which I trust in your case is not wholly absent be based on regard and—and on some measure of esteem, it can only be likened to one of those shallow-rooted plants which the first tempest infallibly uproots."

Launce had an excellent memory, and his last sentence had been conveyed bodily from a novel he had lately been reading. "It is just the sort of trashy aphorism that Ethel would appreciate," he had said to himself, and he had resolved to retain it in his mind till a suitable occasion should arise for making use of it. After a scarcely perceptible pause, he resumed:

"I am afraid you wronged me somewhat in your thoughts in making your confession, if I may be allowed to call it so, seem such a measure of necessity. As if any love worthy of the name could be affected, or lessened, by the fact of your being the child of unknown parents, and owing all you possess to the kindness of others in no way bound to you by the ties of kindred! I trust, for the honour of my sex, there are not many men with whom such considerations would have more weight than a grain of sand."

He spoke with so much earnestness and with such a tone of conviction, that it was impossible for Ethel not to be impressed by his words. She glanced up into his face. He was certainly very good-looking, especially just now when his features were lighted up with what seemed to her like the glow of a chivalrous and high-souled passion. She told herself that he had never been so dear to her as at that moment. She felt that she *almost* loved him.

"It was not because I distrusted your affection that I told you what I did," she said gently, "but as a simple matter of right and justice, in view of the relations that exist between us."

"In any case, we may now regard it as an incident that is over and done with. For my part, I see no need for either you or I ever to refer to it again. And now, perhaps, I may be allowed to go in search of your aunts and explain to them the errand which has brought me here."

"Yes, you have my permission to go now," answered Ethel, with a smile that was born of a blush.

They turned in the direction of the house, parting at a point where the path divided in two. Keymer took the road to the right, which would bring him out close to the main entrance of Vale View. Ethel took the one to the left, and entered the house by way of the conservatory, going straight to her own room, where she remained alone, lost in a tangled maze of thoughts in which the past, the present, and the future were inextricably mixed up, till Tamsin knocked at her door, an hour later, and brought her word that her aunts would like to see her in the drawing-room.

"And there's been a young man shut up with them for sixty minutes by the clock," added the elder woman as she glanced shrewdly at the girl. "I fancy it's young Mr. Keymer, the brewer's son. I hope he's not here on your account, honey. I had a good look at him when I took him in a cup of tea half an hour ago. (It's Charlotte's afternoon off, so I did the waiting myself.) He's fair enough to look upon, but, oh! my dearie, he's far too smooth-spoken for me—butter itself would hardly melt in his mouth: and why does he glance at you sideways out of the corners of his eyes when he thinks you're not looking? A man not to be trusted, for all his pleasant tongue. Have heed to an old woman's instinct, honey, and don't you have anything to do with him."

Ethel was too flustered to reply. She gave Tamsin a look which the latter was unable to interpret, and then ran quickly downstairs. She paused at the drawing-room door and pressed her hand to her side for a few seconds. Her heart was pulsating at railway speed. Tamsin's words rang in her ears. "A man not to be trusted." But she had trusted him and would trust him to the end! She drew herself up proudly, turned the handle of the door and went in.

It is to be borne in mind that the ladies of Vale View were already acquainted with young Keymer, they having met him at various social gatherings during the course of the last year or two. His good looks and *debonnair* manner had not failed to prepossess them in his favour, as they did nearly every one with whom he was brought in contact.

There was a small fire in the grate, for the spring evenings were still chilly, and Launce was standing by it with one elbow resting on the chimney-piece. Ethel's eyes sought his face for a moment as she entered the room. One glance at it was enough to tell her that he had won the day.

Miss Matilda rose from her chair and met Ethel half-way across the room. Taking the girl's head between her hands, she drew it forward and imprinted a tender kiss on the pure young brow.

"My love, we congratulate you," she said simply, but her voice trembled, and the smile that accompanied her words was closely allied to tears.

"Can you ever forgive me for having kept it secret from you for four whole weeks?" demanded Ethel tremulously.

"My dear," replied Miss Matilda, with a touch of stateliness, "Mr. Keymer has already been good enough to explain that it was only by his express desire you consented to do so. He had his reasons. Not a word more is needed."

CHAPTER XII.

A RECREANT LOVER.

THE day was two hours older.

Launce Keymer had not required much pressing to induce him to accept the invitation of the ladies of Vale View to join them over their early supper. The sisters had been used to early hours in their youth, and as they did not account themselves as being in any respect fashionable folk, they had seen no reason to alter their ways now they were growing old. In the dining-room the lamps were lighted and the curtains drawn. The circular table was laid out with immaculate napery and gleaming silver, with a china centre bowl heaped with some of the flowers Ethel had gathered earlier in the day, supplemented by other blooms from the conservatory. Charlotte, deftest of waiting-maids, in her neat black dress and snowy cuffs and apron, had an eye to the wants of each and all.

Keymer was in the brightest of spirits, and did not allow the talk to flag for a moment. The sisters had not laughed so much for a long time as they did over his description of a voyage in bad weather from Boulogne to Folkestone. He was a capital mimic, and the way in which he hit off the idiosyncrasies of sundry of those on board was genuinely diverting, without any trace of the vulgarity to which such a subject so readily lends itself; for Launce Keymer was clever enough to know where to draw the line in accordance with the class of company in which he happened to find himself. As for Charlotte, she was several times compelled to turn her back on the table, and even then was unable wholly to suppress the giggle with which she could not help greeting some of Mr. Keymer's sallies.

If Ethel did not laugh much, a smile was rarely long absent from her lips, while there was a sparkle in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks such as, to those who knew her well, might almost have seemed due to a touch of fever. But, if such were the case, they had their origin in a fever of the mind rather than of the body. Was she happy? She could not have told. Had the question put itself to her, she would have thrust it aside, and have resolutely refused to answer it. Self-analysis was about the last thing she would have cared to enter upon just then; indeed, she was far too healthy-minded to indulge much at any time in introspective moods and fancies. So many surprising things had happened to her in the

course of the day, that she might well be excused for feeling as if she had not yet recovered her mental equilibrium. She ate scarcely anything, and to her that scene at the supper-table was almost as unreal as some phantasmagoria, conjured up by an overwrought brain. What she needed was a long night's sleep to calm her overheated pulses, and restore the delicate balance of her nervous system which a crowd of circumstances had for the moment sufficed to disturb.

Supper was just over, but the ladies had not yet risen from the table, when Fanny, the under housemaid, entered the room with a letter which had arrived by the evening post. The letter was addressed to "The Misses Thursby," but, as a matter of course, she took it direct to Miss Matilda, as she would have taken it to Miss Jane had it not arrived till a fortnight later. Miss Matilda examined the address and post-mark through her *pince-nez*, which she did not wear habitually, but only when reading or writing.

"It bears the London post-mark," she remarked to her sister, across the table; "but the writing of the address is strange to me." Then turning to Launce, with a smile and a little bow, she said: "Have I your permission, Mr. Keymer?"

"Most certainly, my dear madam," he replied, with a grave inclination of the head. Then, while Miss Matilda was occupied with the opening and reading of her letter, he said to himself, glancing from one sister to the other: "What a couple of queer old frumps they are! They are awfully nice and good, though, far too good, not to say goody-goody, for the like of me. If I were compelled to be shut up here, I should be bored to death in a week. I suppose this place will be Ethel's, when they have gone over to the majority. Well, by that time, what's Ethel's will be mine, and it strikes me I could make myself pretty comfortable at Vale View, with a thousand, or twelve hundred a year. No, on second thoughts, I could never bear to settle down here. I should let the place and—but what's up with the old damsel? She looks as if she might be going to have a fit."

And, indeed, Miss Matilda's face, as she read the letter, had gradually faded to a dull, ashen hue.

"What is it, Mattie, dear?" demanded Miss Jane, with a gasp. It was a proof how much she was moved that she should have addressed her sister before company by the familiar name of her girlhood.

"Oh, aunty, what has happened?" broke in Ethel.

For answer Miss Matilda pushed the letter across the table to her sister. "Perhaps you had better read it for yourself," she said. Then turning to Charlotte, she added: "You can leave the room till I ring."

Miss Jane, with fingers that trembled slightly, brought her *pince-nez* into requisition and did as her sister had bidden her. "What does it mean?" she asked when she had read it through; but there

was a frightened look in her eyes which seemed to indicate that, in part at least, she guessed.

"It means ruin, sister—nothing less than ruin," replied Miss Matilda in her most solemn tones, "should what is here stated prove on further investigation to be the fact."

At the word "ruin" Keymer's marrow seemed to freeze. If the sisters were ruined, where, then, would be the fortune which Ethel was to have inherited as their heiress?

For a while no one spoke. What, indeed, was there to say? The shock was of a kind which words could do nothing to mitigate, and at no time were the sisters in the habit of giving vent to their feelings in futile exclamations. They were of the women who suffer mostly in silence.

Presently, Miss Matilda, reading in the look with which Keymer was regarding her what seemed like a note of interrogation, said to herself: "It is due to him that he should be told the particulars of our loss; for is he not now almost like one of ourselves?" With that she handed him the letter. "Oblige me by reading this, Mr. Keymer," she said. "Your doing so will save me the necessity of a long explanation."

He took the letter in silence.

Well might Miss Matilda turn pale when she read it. Briefly stated, the information it conveyed (afterwards supplemented by her for Keymer's further enlightenment) was to the following purport: The London solicitor through whom, and through whose father before him, nearly all the monetary affairs of the sisters had been managed since the time when they were quite young women, had recently died. Although Mr. Tidson's cheque for the interest due on account of the various investments he was supposed to have made on their behalf had come to hand with the utmost regularity, the securities which should have represented the investments in question were not now to be found, and there was only too much reason to fear that the dead man had surreptitiously disposed of them from time to time and applied the proceeds to his own use. The letter concluded with an intimation that the sisters should hear further from the writer in the course of a few days.

As Launce Keymer, a little later, walked homeward through the dewy night, the word *ruin* rang in his ears like a knell. Ethel Thursby (or whatever her right name was, or ought to be) was a charming girl, no one more so—although, perhaps, a trifle too demure and puritanical for his taste—and, as heiress to the spinsters, he would gladly have made her his wife. But to marry her without a shilling to call her own, either now or in time to come, was an altogether different affair.

Launce lost no time on the morrow in laying the case before his father. That astute person, having heard him quietly to the end, said: "What a very fortunate thing it is that this news has come to hand now, instead of later on. Of course the affair must not be

allowed to proceed any further till we have ascertained for a fact whether the old maids are, or are not, ruined. After all, it is just possible that the missing securities may turn up and nobody be a penny the poorer. By the way, has the girl any letters written by you in her possession?"

"Not a single line."

"So much the better. Now, what you must do is to disappear from the scene for awhile. You can run down to Cornwall and stay with your uncle for a week or two."

"But," urged Launce, "I can't, with any show of decency, leave home without either calling on, or writing to Ethel, and giving some more or less plausible excuse for my absence."

"You must neither call nor write," said his father. "You had better start by the three o'clock train this afternoon, and have your right wrist bound up as if the result of a sprain. I will make all needful excuses for you."

Launce Keymer was one of that numerous class of young men who can do with an unlimited quantity of holidays, and his father's suggestion seemed to him in every way an admirable one. Accordingly, the three o'clock train carried him away in due course, with his wrist bound up in accordance with his father's directions; but by the time St. Oswyth's had been left half-a-dozen miles behind, the bandage was unrolled and flung out of the carriage window.

In the course of the same afternoon a note, addressed to "Miss Thursby," was delivered at Vale View. In it Mr. Keymer senior begged to inform that lady, that, in consequence of his son having been called away by telegram owing to the serious illness of a near relative, he—Launce—would not be able to dine at Vale View that day, as promised. His son would himself have written had he not unfortunately happened to sprain his wrist so severely that it would be impossible for him to hold a pen for some time to come.

The note made no mention of Ethel, purposely leaving it an open question whether, before quitting home, Launce had, or had not, confided to his father the fact of his engagement.

Later in the day Mr. Keymer senior made it his business to call on his cousin, the lawyer's clerk. To him he said: "I have reason to believe that the Miss Thursbys of Vale View have lost the greater part, if not the whole, of their fortune. What I want you to do is, to keep your eyes and ears open and pick up whatever scraps of information may come in your way tending to prove either the truth or falsity of the rumour which has reached me."

The brewer argued with himself that if the news conveyed by the letter which Launce had read should prove to be correct, the sisters would go to his cousin's employer, as their local man of business, and seek his advice in the matter—which, some few days later, was precisely what they did.

(To be continued.)

A CENTENARIAN.

IN MEMORIAM : REVEREND JOHN WRIGHT. BORN MARCH
1793; DIED MARCH 1893.

THERE passed away a short time ago, quietly, without any bugle note, or record in the press of the day, one who had been a very great man in his time; whose life had been spent in the busy scenes of the great world, amidst its greatest men; who had fulfilled many years of that life at Court, had been the friend of monarchs and the intimate of those who were closely allied to kings.

Had he lived a few more days, he would have closed his hundredth year: and until within a year of his death, he retained all the marvellous gifts of mind with which Nature had endowed him: all those powers which made him the Dr. Johnson of his generation, the most eloquent preacher of his day; a shining light in the Church; a deeply religious man of sound doctrine and firm principles; the truest of friends, the best and most hospitable of hosts, one of the greatest conversationalists of his time; a man overflowing with wit and humour; of profound learning; full of human sympathy and loving-kindness; who would have liked to make all men good and have all men happy.

John Wright was born in March 1793, and in March 1893 he died. Thus he passed through one of the most remarkable centuries of the world's history: a century which has probably seen more changes, more progress, than any other century since the Creation: for when its history comes to be written, the wonderful difference between that and even the eighteenth century will read as a fairy tale. Of his boyhood and youth we have nothing to record, for we know nothing about it. We first hear of him as a student of Trinity College, Cambridge, where in due time he took his degree: possibly took honours, but of this we are not certain. It goes back to somewhere about the days of the battle of Waterloo, and that is a long time ago. Undoubtedly the capacity of his mind was equal to any strain, and would answer to any pressure that might be put upon it.

In due time John Wright was ordained, and we have heard him say many a time and oft in his old age: "If I had my time to come over again, and my profession to choose, it should be the Church. It is the grandest and the most noble profession in the whole world. But if I could not have been a clergyman, then I would have been a barrister."

Happy they, who at the end of a long life look back with pleasure upon the choice of their life's work.

For some years after his ordination, Mr. Wright remained a curate,

making friends wherever he went, gaining souls by his zeal, his eloquence and his personal influence; beloved by every one with whom he came into contact.

Nothing less was possible to a man who possessed in so great a degree the divine gift of sympathy. For his tomb no more fitting inscription could be found than that "*He loved his fellow men:*" for nothing could be more true. It may safely be said that no one ever went to him for sympathy without receiving abundantly more than he expected. Himself walking uprightly, he was full of leniency and compassion for the sins and frailties and shortcomings of mankind, hating the sin, ever finding excuse for the sinner: trying to win by love, not to alienate by severity.

Of his great charm and power over people we have an example ready to hand of a singular and most interesting description. It occurred when he was still a curate, in a parish not very far from Cambridge, where many poor were to be found, who worked hard for their daily bread, and to whom shillings, to say nothing of pounds, were of consequence.

He was about to resign his curacy in favour of another, and in the parish the impression seemed to have gone forth that he was leaving because the stipend was insufficient. There was universal lamentation and mourning; he had endeared himself to all hearts, and they were unwilling to let him go.

One day a humble deputation of three women called upon him.

One was his washerwoman, the other two were women who had equally to work for their living. With tears in their eyes they had come to say they had heard he was about to leave them, and hoped he would reconsider the matter. They were told that his stipend was too small. To assist in overcoming that difficulty the laundress had come to offer to do his washing and that of his whole household for nothing, and the other two women would contribute twelve pounds a year between them out of their hard-earned substance, towards an augmentation fund, if only he would consent to remain amongst them. How deeply such a proposal and such an evidence of his power must have affected Mr. Wright we can imagine.

Surely a similar deputation never was heard of before. John Wright was ever sympathetic and warm-hearted; at all times accessible, and most especially so to the poor and suffering: and had not arrangements been finally concluded, it is probable that, whilst rejecting the proffered assistance of the good ladies, he would have yielded to their wishes, and remained to gladden and elevate the parish by his piety, his eloquence, and his earnestness.

Upon this very matter, we have before us a letter from Charles Simeon, written to Mr. Wright from King's College, Cambridge, when the century was still young. Of the influence of this great divine it is not necessary to enlarge upon here. Though he passed away two generations ago, and his personality has long been

forgotten, he is emphatically one of those men who "being dead yet speak," and he will continue to speak as long as the English Church remains. Ordinary people in these days hear that such and such a living is vested in "Simeon's Trustees," but to most it has become almost an unintelligible term. It tells them nothing of the great man who was a "Master of Israel," and whose name seventy years ago was a greater name to conjure by than perhaps the Master of Trinity himself. Certain it is that his influence has long outlived the fame of nearly all his contemporaries; and more than ever at this moment it is fighting against a movement that he would have been the first to condemn. Probably no single man has ever done more for the Established Church of England and the true reading of her Articles than Charles Simeon.

Simeon had a great regard and a very great affection for his friend John Wright. He recognised and admired his great talents, his zeal, the unrivalled eloquence of his preaching; he saw that he had strong religious convictions, and that no bribe would cause him to sin against his conscience, or swerve one hair's-breadth from his views. In short he was a man after Simeon's own heart: and greater praise than this need not be given. For with all his generosity, his self-denial and devotion to the Church, Charles Simeon was an eminently shrewd man, reading people at a glance, and seldom wrong in his estimate of them. The letter we have alluded to is too interesting not to be recorded, and runs thus:—

"MY DEAR SIR,"—(his letters generally began "My dear Friend")

"I was sorry that I had not time to write a Testimonial for you before you set off this morning. But in my judgment formal Testimonials are of small value in comparison of *facts*. If *they* were called for, I would gladly supply them, being well qualified to do so after so many years. If I addressed myself to the few leading gentlemen whose talents are of a higher order, I would give them this simple fact, that within these three months I offered you a situation of £1000 a year, where you would have moved in the highest circles, and ministered to the most intelligent audience, and that if your wife had not dreaded a separation from her native land, you would at this moment have been upon the high seas for your destination. This to the higher classes speaks volumes.

"But Foote used to read his plays to his housekeeper, fully assured, that what pleased her, would please the whole audience. I will therefore supply a few facts for the many, and if they be duly appreciated, I have no doubt they will carry, as with a unanimous feeling, the few also; because they, whilst able to form a just estimate of higher excellences, know and feel what will prove the greatest blessing to a town like Ipswich.

"The first is that when you had served for a few Sundays a parish in this neighbourhood, in the place of a gentleman who was

about to leave it, the parishioners without ever consulting you, drew up a petition and sent it to the vicar that you might be appointed to that post, and to that post you are appointed.

"The second fact I have heard by chance within these few days. It is this—you are serving a church which at Michaelmas you will leave. But so anxious are the poor to have you, that two *poor* women, imagining that the smallness of your salary was the occasion of your leaving them, came and pledged themselves to contribute £12 a year in order to augment it; and a third poor woman, a washer-woman, offered to wash for you and for your family, *gratis*.

"What can I add to this? If the other spoke *Volumes to the ew*, this speaks *Libraries to the many*.

"I should only detract from this, if I did more than affix the signature of

"Your very affectionate Friend,

"K. C., Camb.

"C. SIMEON."

"P.S. I called at Dr. Godfrey's, assured that he would gladly give you a Testimonial: but, alas! he was gone from College, and I know not his address.

"If a Testimonial be wanted from Professor Farish, and Professor Scholefield, I can get them in an instant. But all the Heads of Colleges, and all the Professors in the University, cannot speak so forcibly as the facts which I have given. Is talent wanted? Is diligence desired? Is amiableness of deportment sought after? What can speak like facts? I only regret that Mrs. W. is not with you; for if you carried ten votes, she would carry twenty. If you are chosen, Ipswich will long bless the persons who brought you both amongst them.

"Let me hear how you go on."

As Charles Simeon himself says, this letter speaks not Volumes only but Libraries. Whether it was a curacy or a living that Mr. Wright had been offered at Ipswich, we do not know: and whether he was successful or not, we cannot say; but we cannot conceive his competing for anything and failing, for he was a head and shoulders above any other man of his time, excepting the few men who, like Charles Simeon, were outside the pale of comparison.

In any case he could not have remained very long in Ipswich, for very soon after the above circumstances, we hear of him as Domestic Chaplain to H.R.H. the late Duke of Cambridge, and a great favourite with the Duchess, near whom it was often his privilege to sit, when he was required to say grace at dinner.

We remember an amusing though trifling anecdote, which Mr. Wright himself would tell with much spirit. It was in the first days of his Royal Chaplaincy: days when, not as now, the dishes were placed upon the table, and the host assisted his guests.

On this occasion fowls happened to be placed before the Duke.

"Mr. Wright, what may I send you?" said His Royal Highness.

"Whatever your Royal Highness pleases," returned the Chaplain, who probably was a little nervous in these early days of his elevation to Royal circles.

Whereupon the Duke, wishing to give his Chaplain a lesson, sent him nothing.

A few days later, and again fowls were placed before the Duke.

"Mr. Wright, what may I have the pleasure of sending you?" said His Royal Highness, with a shrewd smile.

"A wing, may it please your Royal Highness," promptly replied the Chaplain, now learned in the art of giving a direct answer to a simple question.

From this time, Mr. Wright spent many years of his life at Court, the intimate friend and companion of some of the highest in the land. We hear of him as Master of Berkeley Chapel, the most popular preacher of the day. The roadway every Sunday morning was almost impassable from the carriages of the fashionable world who thronged to hear him. He became one of the most conspicuous lights in London society. No man was more sought after; the dinner-table that secured him was considered the most fortunate. Honours of every description were heaped upon him. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society, as well as of all the lesser Societies then existing. His own house was a marvel of splendour, though never outstripping the bounds of good taste. He was a most intimate friend of Queen Adelaide, who thought he had no equal. "He is a good man," she one day remarked to her Almoner; "let nothing be denied him that he desires."

If any man's head could be turned by prosperity, surely Mr. Wright was in danger at this period of his career.

The attention, the praise, the flattery, the affection he received from all ranks of society, from Royalty and crowned heads downwards, must have proved almost too much for mortal being. He became, and he remained to the last day of his life, one of the most courtly men of his time, with a charm of manner not to be described. With it all he was one of the most genial and kindly of men, who always knew the best thing to say and the right moment to say it. No one could be in his presence for three minutes without feeling that he was a giant amongst men. In his person he was extremely imposing. There was a dignity about him which could not be mistaken. His head was magnificent, but so well shaped that its great size was not observed. The broad forehead rose in a lofty dome, which in later years, when the writer first knew him, was set off by a fringe of curling white hair.

Once when consulting Professor Donovan, the phrenologist of that day, the latter remarked:

"Sir, I do not know who you are, but this I do know: that you

ought to succeed in everything you undertake. Your brain is two inches larger than any brain that ever came under my hands. I see that you are a clergyman, and that is what Nature intended you to be. Failing that, you ought to have been a barrister. But you would have ruined half your clients' causes, for your failings are rashness and impulsiveness. Your organ of benevolence is too largely developed, and in spite of all your talent, no matter how rich you may now be, you will have to be careful that you do not die a poor man."

At that time the caution seemed almost superfluous, for Mr. Wright was not only what may be called a monster of prosperity, but was also in possession of ten thousand a year—a very large income sixty and seventy years ago. There seemed no reason why this should not last for ever. There was moreover scarcely an influential person in the kingdom of whom he did not possess the ear.

We repeat, that if ever Mr. Wright was in spiritual danger it was now. He had his failings as we all have ours: but all have not his virtues. He loved magnificence: the very greatness of his mind, the very geniality and generosity of his temperament caused him to err on the side of display and ceremony. And, look which way he would, his eyes met nothing else. All the pomp and etiquette, the gold and glitter of Court life surrounded him; and he was made to feel himself one of the greatest acquisitions in the most distinguished assemblies of the day. When he entered a drawing-room, all radiated towards him. His refined but magnificent voice was soon heard flowing through the room, and at once prepossessed you in his favour. It was marked by a ring of sincerity, which can never be mistaken or assumed; very sweet and musical, it charmed the ear. Joined to his singular eloquence, it took everyone captive: and it was a saying that Mr. Wright's voice would win you even against your reason.

His powers as a conversationalist were not less great than his eloquence as a preacher. His memory was marvellous; his stores of anecdote inexhaustible; his way of narrating them we have never heard equalled. He was a perfect host in himself: with all the self-possession which generally comes to the man of the world, and enables him to make the very most of his powers.

And so none will wonder if Mr. Wright was in danger of becoming wedded to the world, of loving its pomps and vanities, its luxury and its display, the praise of men and the smiles of Royalty, more than was good for his spiritual welfare, or possible to the just fulfilment of his ordination vows. But he was too great and conscientious a man to be allowed to drift. He himself, if realising his danger, would have been the very first to pray earnestly and constantly: "Remove far from me the temptation."

And it was taken from him.

Suddenly his health broke down; the doctors told him that he must leave London or they would not answer for the consequences. The constant whirl of fashionable life; the continual strain upon

his intellect; the claims of his church on the one hand, and of society on the other: all proved too much for one who though a giant in constitution, possessed a sensitive and highly-strung nervous system. Amongst other symptoms, neuralgia seized him as its victim, though we believe that in those days it was known by a simpler name. It would take him in the hand and arm, so suddenly and with such force that in a moment he would be struck down to the ground with intensity of pain. Repose of body, rest to the nerves, fresh air, these were said to be henceforth indispensable. London must know him no more, excepting as an occasional visitor.

John Wright was not a man to hesitate where his duty was plainly marked. It must have cost him many a pang, many a regret to give up all his splendour and magnificence and popularity, his intimacy with Court circles, and his Sunday ministrations to those who could best appreciate him—the highest and most intellectual in the land; but it was done, and done at once. The living of Great Malvern was offered to him and accepted, and he became master of the beautiful Abbey Church; a marked contrast to the plain Berkeley Chapel which had lately known him: a contrast which appealed to all his sympathies, for his refined nature loved everything that was beautiful both in Nature and in Art.

At Great Malvern his popularity did not forsake him. Wherever he went, his charm went also.

He was a lover of hospitality: as liberal to his rich guests as he was good and benevolent to the poor. He became the intimate friend of all the county society for miles round, with most of which he was already acquainted.

His house was admirably appointed, and his frequent dinner parties were much sought after. Mr. Wright was a man who could not live without coming into contact with his fellow-men, and he was never so happy, never shone so brilliantly as when, in his own home, he was surrounded by a party of intimate and illustrious acquaintances. His geniality and his subdued but hearty laugh were infectious, whilst his eloquence held every one spell-bound. At one of his dinner parties, however, a slight *contretemps* happened, which probably no one regretted more than the chief actor in the scene, when it had all passed away.

Amongst other hospitable traits, Mr. Wright's dinner parties were celebrated for the excellence of their wines. On one occasion, a guest present had committed the indiscretion of taking a little more than was good for him. This guest had never been a favourite with the Vicar, but he was a personage who could not be always passed over. On the table was a rare and costly dessert service which had been given to the host as a testimonial. In front of this said personage there happened to be placed upon one of these matchless dishes a pineapple. When the moment of dessert arrived, the somewhat elated guest took up a knife and with tremendous force slashed down the

middle of the pine, cut the dish in half beneath it, and cut the cloth beneath the dish.

None knew better than the Vicar how to turn aside such an accident ; no one possessed more tact. Whatever he may have felt, he showed nothing : and in a moment, with all his charming ease of manner, he turned the conversation to something that was happening a hundred miles away.

But the evening was not over.

As some of the guests were departing, it seemed that fate was determined to revenge the Vicar for his broken dish. The offending guest reached the top of the staircase, missed his footing, and pitched from the top to the bottom of the stairs, where he was assisted up and conveyed to his carriage with a damaged head.

"My dear Wright," said Lord C——y, who was amongst the guests, "Fortune is revenging you. Poor X. broke your dish, and she has broken his head."

"Hush !" cried the Vicar ; "we must not say that ; I will forgive the fracture to my dish, if only Fortune has not fractured his skull. Poor X !—he cannot help it."

But he was never again a guest at the Vicar's dinner table.

One of Mr. Wright's most intimate friends at this time was Lady Emily Foley, one of the best, most earnest, and most philanthropic of women ; and the good that she did in the neighbourhood with the aid of the Vicar, was known to few.

Very much of Mr. Wright's life at this time would read almost as a romance if written : but in the space of a few pages it is impossible to do more than allude to it. We are not writing a biography, but merely a passing record, a tribute of affection to a great man who had long outlived his day and generation : who found himself the last survivor of all the great and illustrious people with whom in his time he had been intimate, and enjoyed almost the greatest of earthly happiness—the pleasures of friendship.

Had Mr. Wright only kept a diary of his life, a record of the people he had known and many of the passages of their acquaintance, it would undoubtedly have formed one of the brightest, most interesting, and most valuable books ever published ; full of anecdotes and full of facts that would now become historical ; for he could carry his memory back to days long before the Battle of Waterloo. But he never attempted anything of the sort. To hear him converse upon those times a few years before his death, relating anecdotes of things that had happened early in the century, bringing before you vividly and with strange reality, famous people who had lived long since, was like listening to a page of remote history, yet infinitely more forcible and life-like than anything ever written in history. Nothing, for instance, ever gave the writer so distinct a portrait of good Queen Adelaide, as Mr. Wright's descriptions of her, and his numerous anecdotes concerning her. To him—the writer—she

stands out as a personage with whom he had come into familiar contact. And so with many people before her time, who were celebrated for their deeds, worth, or talents: and who are now more or less historical.

But to return to Great Malvern.

Even these days were to come to an end. It seemed as though one of Mr. Wright's favourite texts was to be applied to him personally: "Here we have no abiding city." Again health failed, so seriously that he could not retain his living and do his duty in it. He was at all times keenly alive to the voice of conscience, and he decided to resign. A long interval of travelling was supposed to be the best thing for him, and he entered upon it. Henceforth for many years his place was to know him no more. He went abroad, going from place to place, carrying his charm with him and always making friends.

Years afterwards, when Mrs. Henry Wood was staying at Great Malvern during a period of serious illness, she was speaking to one of the humble donkey-women who happened to be near St. Ann's Well. She was an old woman who had lived all her life in the neighbourhood.

"Do you remember Mr. Wright, who years ago was Vicar of Great Malvern?" asked Mrs. Henry Wood. "Was he liked when he lived amongst you?"

"Do I remember him, ma'am?" cried the woman. "Was he liked?" clasping her hands in earnestness, whilst the tears came to her eyes. "Ma'am, his name is still blessed amongst us. We never had his like in Malvern before, and we never shall again."

Some time after, Mrs. Henry Wood gratified Mr. Wright by recording the little incident to him. For we are all human, and who does not like to feel, when he has passed away, that he dwells in the hearts of those who remain behind?

When Mr. Wright first entered into the writer's life, the latter was a young lad living abroad with his parents.

Mr. Wright came to them with an introduction from mutual friends, and an intimacy was soon formed which only death interrupted. Even in those days he had very nearly reached the allotted span of life, yet was in all essential points still a young man. He had regained in great measure his vigorous health, though occasionally suffering. His mind could never have been stronger, nor his eloquence greater than at that time. But for his grey hairs and a certain portliness, he might have been less than middle-aged. His voice was fresh, musical and charming. He was full of energy, overflowing with life, sparkling with wit. Years had only mellowed him. He now possessed all the wisdom of experience added to all his other gifts.

It chanced that he took a great fancy for the writer, and thought he saw in him signs and promises which existed only in his own mind.

Frequent walks and conversations ended in his making a proposition to the boy's father.

"I want you to give me C.," he said one day. "Make him over to me. Let me become responsible for him. I have no occupation—let me become his tutor, and I will engage to fit him for any examination you might desire him to pass, or any college he might wish to enter. With me it will be a labour of love: and I don't think you will ever regret it."

The proposal, fortunately for the writer, was accepted, but in a modified form. The parents could not part with the lad: and they could only agree to the proposal on condition that Mr. Wright would accept such a consideration as any first-rate tutor would have received under similar circumstances.

It was a new era in the boy's life, and one for which he was ever afterwards grateful. If Mr. Wright possessed one gift more than another, it was the gift of imparting knowledge. Everything under his hands, explained by his clear and comprehensive mind, became easy. More Latin and Greek were learned with him in one year than would have been acquired in three or four years at a public school. With him all the drudgery of learning was lost sight of. Every task was a pleasure; if ever there was a royal road to learning he possessed it. When twelve o'clock came, signal for ceasing work, it brought regret, not relief. He was as great in mathematics as in classics; it would have been difficult to puzzle him in either.

In other branches of education he was equally well read. There was not a place on the atlas that he would not immediately point out to you; not an event in history of which he did not know the date and details. His memory was marvellous and seemed to embrace all subjects and all time; and it was as strong and clear at seventy as it could have been forty years earlier.

Whatever subject he took up, his graphic mind brought vividly before you. Sometimes in their walks he would begin talking of the days of Ancient Rome; and draw such pictures that you were soon lost in the past. You trod the floor of the Palace of the Cæsars; you watched the gilded pageantry upon the classic Tiber; you listened to the clash of arms in the plains beyond as foe met foe in deadly combat; you felt yourself the very centre of conspiracies, and saw the gleam of the assassin's dagger taking Cæsar's life; you journeyed on the Appian Way with St. Paul, and saw him parting from his companions at the *Three Taverns*; you lost yourself in the mazes of the gloomy catacombs; and again, were assisting at the Easter festivities, watching the Pope with outstretched arms blessing the thousands of bowed heads under the shadow of St. Peter's.

Or perhaps the scene of conversation would be the Isles of Greece, whose shores are for ever washed by the transparent waters of the Mediterranean; where the air is for ever clear and bright and the hills are exquisite in form. In spirit they would wander back to the days of

Phidias and the glories of the Parthenon ; days when she was great in Art and cultivated the beautiful as it had never yet been known. A charm surrounded Attica, which for the writer has never faded. He saw Athens as she then was ; stripped of the magic halo of time, which now casts a glamour and an illusion over her ill-paved streets. They mounted to the Acropolis and looked out upon that marvellous world crowded with the beauties of Nature and Art, with lovely hills in outline on the one hand and the far-famed matchless sea on the other. Together they would visit the Temple of Zeus with its wonderful pillars, and, mentally always, would gaze upon the small hill of the Areopagus, where Paul preached to the Athenians under the shadow of the matchless Parthenon ; and so on to the gate of the Acropolis, with its barren rocks, its fallen pillars, and the temple of Wingless Victory ; the shimmering sea lying in the sunshine, backed by those sleeping mountains amidst which *Ægina* and *Argolis* are conspicuous.

And again a few words would transport them from the lofty Acropolis of Athens to the well-worn pavements of the Roman Forum, with its classic arches and wonderful temples almost overshadowed by the stupendous walls of the Coliseum, all brightened by the matchless Roman skies.

Everything in Mr. Wright's hands became a delight. He had the rare faculty of at once arousing your interest and enchaining your mind. To come into daily, hourly contact with him was a rare privilege. Though he had ceased to take part in Court life, he had lost none of his courtliness. Essentially refined and well-bred, it was impossible that he should not have a lasting influence upon one whose character was still forming. And so the writer esteems his intimacy with John Wright one of the chief privileges and pleasures of his life.

Between himself and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wood a lasting friendship sprang up : and long after Mr. Henry Wood had passed away, the writer has seen Mr. Wright shed tears at the recollection of his friend. "I think," he would say, "he was the most fascinating and lovable man I ever met with in the whole course of my life."

He was one of Mrs. Henry Wood's greatest admirers, and would declare that she caused him to believe that there was such a thing as secular inspiration. He was wont, the writer well remembers, to pay her a compliment she well deserved. "In all the days of my life at Court," he would say, "I have seen many a beautiful hand and arm ; but I never saw one that could in the least approach that of Mrs. Henry Wood." It was quite true : her hand and arm were matchless. He had the greatest possible admiration for her talent, but still more for herself ; and he would say, that, charming as Mrs. Henry Wood's heroines were, she herself excelled them all. Night after night her drawing-room would be made eloquent with his rare conversational powers. Often he would challenge her to a game of chess, and though a famous player himself, more often than not she was the

victor—as befitted the last representative of a great chess-playing family. Her father had been one of the best players of his day.

We have said that Mr. Wright possessed the gift of narrating anecdotes in a manner we have never heard equalled. His energy and vivacity, his wonderful command of language, his graphic powers of description—all was brought to bear upon the subject in hand. But if he excelled in one species of story more than another, it was in a ghost story. Many an evening his friends' younger children were allowed to leave the schoolroom for the drawing-room by way of special indulgence, and would listen absorbed, enraptured, thrilled, to ghost stories and Eastern tales, which, it is needless to say, were not of a kind to inspire terror or lead to nightmare: stories that in the charm of their telling would equally interest his older hearers. Those were famous evenings; red letter days in life; and days that, occurring at the most impressionable age, must needs remain in the memory as long as life lasted.

It is a rare picture that rises before the mind's eye. The picture of a strangely beautiful and graceful and gracious hostess, with all the softness of womanhood about her, and all the charm and sparkle of intellect; the pale, refined face of the host, only less brilliant himself than his guest, and the courtly, eloquent, delightful divine, always fastidiously correct in dress, whose rich musical voice would flow out in a constant stream of eloquent and witty conversation. A more remarkable trio could not have been brought together.

But time does not stand still, and those days passed away: and foreign lands gave place to home skies. When "East Lynne" was written and the author became famous, no one rejoiced more sincerely than her old friend John Wright, who saw all his prophecies fulfilled.

The years passed on and still this wonderful and aged man did not grow old. When nearly seventy years of age, he had married again and lived to see the eldest of three children born of that marriage attain the age of thirty! When past eighty years of age, he thought he should like to enter once more into active service. His faculties seemed as fresh and vigorous as ever, perfectly unimpaired. The important living of Falmouth—in point of emolument one of the best livings in England—was offered to him and accepted: and he held it for nearly ten years.

During that ten years the writer frequently visited him; and those visits are amongst his pleasantest recollections. The charm began the moment the house was entered, and ceased only when the house was finally left.

One of the Rector's favourite amusements was to take a "clergyman's week," and he and his quondam pupil would depart on a twelve days' drive round the coast. The Rector, using his own carriage, his coachman knowing every inch of the two counties and many an out-of-the-way nook of beauty: would travel about twenty or twenty-five miles every day; reaching home again on the Saturday week, in time for the

Sunday service : and generally they had wandered so far that the last day was spent in returning by train. In this way the writer grew intimate with all the beauties of the Cornish and Devon coast : beauties that became dear to his heart. Every mile of the way, every hour of the day, and every day of the excursion became charming and memorable from the store of knowledge, the fund of wit and humour, which flowed from the Rector like an inexhaustible stream : and when the unlucky Saturday evening arrived, it seemed that they had gone through months of rich experience.

At Falmouth, as everywhere, he won golden opinions and endeared himself to all hearts. When he took possession of the living, his congregation might almost have been numbered by units ; but before many Sundays had passed not only was every seat in the church filled, but the aisles were crowded with people who stood throughout the service.

This he retained for some years. At length, when past ninety years of age, he thought he ought to retire in favour of a younger and a better man. A younger could easily be found, but a better, never. He was still full of life and energy. To all appearance his faculties were as brilliant as ever ; and he looked very little older than when the writer first knew him. But it is possible that he began to feel the need of repose, the burden of years : and so he resigned his living and Falmouth knew him no more. He returned to Norfolk, which had been his home, where he had many ties ; and from the warm breezes of Cornwall to the storms of the more rugged coast the writer had to transfer his visits. But had the Rector chosen Iceland or Siberia for his dwelling-place, still the visits would have been paid.

At ninety-four years of age he came up alone, seemingly in full health and strength, to the funeral of his old friend Mrs. Henry Wood, whose death was one of the sad events of his life. And if anything could have brought consolation to a home plunged into the very depths of sorrow and bereavement, it was his presence. But at such a moment, even he was powerless to offer anything but the profoundest sympathy. At her funeral he was one of the chief mourners, and aged and grey, his magnificent head bare to the wintry sunshine, he was a remarkable and most impressive figure.

A few years before his death he gave to the writer a large trunkful of his written sermons : sermons that in years gone by had been preached before Royalty and had held many a fashionable congregation spell-bound. They are amongst the writer's treasures : written out in the clear and beautiful hand for which their author was famous. They are wonders of eloquence, of orthodoxy, of spirituality, of terse and vigorous English, the best examples of a nervous and finished style. Lately when showing one or two to a friend, himself a most exceptional preacher, he was greatly struck with them. "Ah !" he exclaimed, "we have no such sermons, no such preachers now. We want more men like Wright in the Church."

Mr. Wright was a sound Churchman. He was also a man who could tolerate nothing in the way of hypocrisy or insincerity: could never put black for white, or sweet for bitter. His doctrine was that the seat of religion must be the heart, and outward forms and ceremonies availed little. With the so-called advanced party: with the Ritualistic movement, which made great strides in the later years of his life: he had no sympathy; but on the contrary feared its probable effects in the future. What he had been in his earlier years, he remained; consistent throughout to his views, never parleying with his conscience. Not to have been made Primate of all England would he have conceded a hair's-breadth of what he considered right. Yet a more tolerant man, one more full of generous sympathy and kindly feeling towards all men, never lived.

We have seen what Charles Simeon thought of him. At this moment we have before us another of his letters, which we feel inclined to quote. We have hesitated, for it has really nothing to do with the matter in hand, and may seem out of place. But it gives a peculiar insight into the character of one of the greatest men of his day; it has the value of antiquity, for it was written when the century was young; it is like a voice speaking out of a tomb long closed: and it proves the earnestness which his friend John Wright was already bringing to bear upon his calling.

It is evident that other correspondence upon the subject had taken place, but what that correspondence was must be left to the reader's imagination:

"By return of post.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I can have no room left for contention with Mr. Leigh. It is all very well to speak of yours as a District Church; and of my Right of Presentation consequent upon it. What must ensue but quarelling, and perhaps a lawsuit? I can suffer no room to be left for these. You can see in Mr. L.'s refusal to vacate, what must arise in the event of anything being done contrary to his will. I wish it then to be understood that what I have given is only given in the event of those objects being attained for which it is given; and that in the failure of those it must be returned. This has been declared from the beginning: and I must not be asked to depart from it.

"This is my answer to your first letter.

"Now let me thank you for your second.

"1st. Respecting difficult parts of Scripture. There is a book written for your very end by Bishop Hall, in 4to, which you may get for 2s. 6d. I, in reading through Mr. Townsend's ponderous volumes, often wished for some explanation to be inserted. But the thought instantly occurred, *that* was not his object. He proposed an object and pursued it: and if he had comprehended what you wish, he must have made his ponderous volumes half as large again.

"It has been proposed to me to add critical notes to my work. What was my object? To comprehend in 21 volumes what, if written in the common way, would have occupied above 100 (allowing 25 Disc. to a volume), and been sold for fifty guineas, instead of for ten guineas. Terseness, comprehensiveness, and real practical utility have been my objects. Would *they* be more advanced in proportion to the additional size and expense of the volumes? *In every instance that I treat*, I do the thing you mention, and leave not a difficulty (that I am aware of) unexplained. And if I were now to go over detached passages, I should swell my work without necessity, and render the sale of it still more difficult than it is. Men with eighty pounds a year and perhaps little else, do not find it easy to give ten guineas for any book. Therefore I have purposely kept mine so low that it costs not one shilling a sermon, *though more than three farthings*. But then I *give* in the whole of Claude, which is 6 sh. more. This you will see has especial respect to Curates, who cannot get more voluminous and expensive works.

"My great object is to render the discharge of the Ministerial Office both edifying and comparatively easy. Is this attained?

"You, in going through my work, will find numberless discourses as concise as you can wish. There are some adapted to *every measure of power* which the student may possess, much help or little, as he needs.

"A thousand thanks for your kindness. If on reflection I should find that I can avail myself of any hint to improve my work, it will assuredly be improved by

"Your very affectionate Friend,

"C. SIMEON."

"K. C., Cambridge."

"I am already nearly at the close of vol. ii. and labouring with all my might to send forth the work in the most perfect way.

"What mercy to possess such vigour both of body and mind! I never was more energetic in my preaching than at this moment. But I am careful not to exceed my strength.

"Mrs. Dornford has been, and still is, very ill: but she is getting better."

What Mr. Wright was in the days of Charles Simeon, such he remained to the end of his life. He was conservative in all ways, not given to change.

Not until he was ninety-nine years of age did his intellect fail him: and then it did so in a peculiar manner. He became possessed with delusions. He thought himself some great and mighty being to whom unlimited power had been given by divine authority. He could build cities at a word; bestow titles, endless wealth on whom he would. Sometimes he would talk for hours: every sentence sensible and reasonable, but the sentences not bearing upon each

other. There were days when he would never cease talking for twenty-four hours, and at the end of that time his voice would be as strong, and he as untired as if he had just awakened out of sleep, whilst those about him would be exhausted and worn out. At times he would know them all: at others would think himself surrounded by strangers.

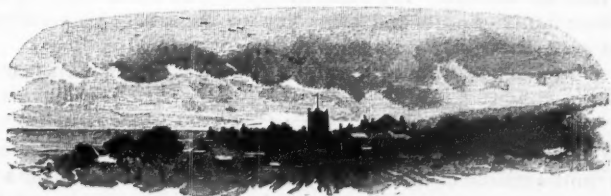
March came in: and with it a change. The wonderful life was evidently about to depart. There was a day when he no longer left his room; and a few days before he was a hundred years old, he breathed his last.

So passed away one who had long outlived his age. Had he died fifty years sooner, the papers would have rung with his praises, sermons would have been preached about him, books would have been written. For he had one of the greatest intellects of his time—he was a man of the greatest influence, and of world-renown. These lines have done feeble justice to such a nature: but only a contemporary of John Wright could have written a fitting record of his life, and only the pen of a Boswell, passing with him side by side through all his days, could have recorded all his eloquence, all the passages of his eventful career. There has never been but one Boswell; and it may be said there never was but one John Wright.

Just one year ago, full of age and honour, he entered upon that long journey from which there is no returning; the goal towards which, from the hour of his birth, he had for a hundred years been slowly and patiently travelling. It may truly be said that he fell asleep, the mortal putting on immortality; and that after life's fitful fever he sleeps well. There was no disease, no illness, nothing but worn-out nature gently transferring the scene. No doubt he had his weaknesses, his failings and temptations; no one is perfect, he held himself least of all so. But in a most eminent degree he possessed the three great gifts and graces of Faith, Hope and Charity; and we repeat that if we were asked to engrave a text upon the tombstone which covers his great heart and intellect, it should be:

“Here lies one who loved his fellow men.”

CHARLES W. WOOD.



HELEN CHALLONER.

I.

Sir Reginald Hamilton to Miss Challoner, Florence.

MY DEAR HELEN,—Do you wonder who addresses you by this familiar name, and will you look at the signature before proceeding further? It is fifteen years since we last waltzed together at the farewell ball before I sailed for India; and though we exchanged a few letters after, I hardly dare hope that even my hand is remembered by you.

My wife died two years ago, leaving me two children, a boy of ten and a girl of eight years. As I am sufficiently well off to retire from office I have come home to England to look after the education of my little ones.

I have before me now your little portrait with some other precious relics of former days, when we danced and laughed and rhymed together during five happy years of our young lives. Do you still look like that, I wonder? Have those mirthful hazel eyes lost their brightness? Have the masses of brown hair diminished? has the rose-tinted cheek faded? Have the troubles and sorrows of life subdued your once gay spirit? Even so, you would still be dearer to me than any other woman living. To me you would always be the same Helen, for my affection was based on something more stable than admiration of your beauty. You must have known that I loved you while we talked of friendship; and you must have divined the reason why I did not ask you to be my wife—because I was too poor and insignificant.

I married! Well, I will leave that page of my history untouched. I am now free, and I offer you in all humility, knowing my own unworthiness, my hand and a home in our own country, which it is in your power to make happy if you will, and where you will be in the society you were born to adorn. Dear Helen, do not answer hastily; take time to consider. My children cry to you for a mother's care, and their father entreats and prays you to bless his house with your bright presence.—Your devoted friend,

REGINALD HAMILTON.

Miss Challoner to Sir R. Hamilton, London.

MY DEAR REGINALD,—I have received and considered your letter. I am quite sensible of the honour you do me, and the advantages you offer. You have achieved distinction in two different walks of life; while I am an old maid of limited means, unknown to fame. And

yet in the old days of our early friendship and comradeship we seemed pretty equal. I was as devoted to literary pursuits as you, and generally called bright. Well, the race is to the swift, and victory to the strong ; between man and woman it must always be an unequal race, and I do not grumble against a law of nature. In my case outward circumstances combined to hamper me. But I believe I am straying from the subject immediately under consideration. I will first give you my views of the matter in the abstract and then make the personal application.

It seems to me that youth is the natural time for mating. Even if a pair are somewhat divided in tastes the pliability of youth and a mutual desire to please will make them grow together by degrees until the little sacrifices of the first months cease to be sacrifices. At middle life a woman has generally lost that adaptability. After having been her own mistress for many years she hardly knows how to surrender her freedom with grace and dignity. Either she sticks to her old ways and becomes crotchety and disagreeable, or she is slavishly anxious to please, and worries her husband with too much attention. She has hitherto lived her own life, selected her own residences, formed her own friendships. On marrying she must give up this individualism and merge herself in a dual existence, of which hers is the weaker component part.

In return she gains a more important position and the society and protection of a man whom she likes and esteems. (At forty, my dear friend, the less said about love the better ; and if there was less pretence of sentiment elderly marriages would prove more satisfactory.) The man gains in comfort by having a lady at the head of his house, and for many men this means much. But does he not also give up something ? Some of his freedom is curtailed as hers is, though not in the same measure. We English who are nothing if not domestic, laugh at the Frenchman who, when urged by a friend to marry the lady to whom he was attached, replied, "Where then should I spend my evenings ?" I find much sense in his remark. A man of mature years ought to think twice before he transfers his chosen friend from her own hearth to his. When the cares of the day are done she puts on her holiday humour with her evening dress, welcomes her friend with a joyful smile, takes an interest in his pursuits and projects, counsels and consoles him in times of trouble, and expects the like good offices from him. Would she be more kind or love him better if he had the right to bounce into her study without knocking, to tell her a chimney was smoking, the cook was late with the dinner, or his new silk umbrella had been stolen out of the hall ? Not a bit of it. Nor would she seem so sweet as she might have done had these mishaps been related by her own fireside in the evening.

You see, my dear Reginald, if I do not believe in love at forty, I believe in friendship, and I think with the Frenchman that it is possible to spoil a charming relation without gaining a solid equivalent.

Now to descend to personalities.

What a curious inconsistency you are, Reginald. For a poet, you were wonderfully prudent when you abandoned literature for law and Eastern tongues, consenting to woo the muses by stealth only and at snatch moments. It was also wise of you, when young and poor, not to ally yourself to a family of decayed fortunes. Now this practical side of your character seems reversed. Would you really take me so trustingly not knowing what changes fifteen years may have wrought? I do not mean in appearance—you expect that—but in character and habits of thought. Do you, a poet and a scholar, know so little of human nature as to suppose that a girl of twenty-one and a woman of thirty-six are one and the same? I will not talk of the troubles I have had; all have suffered; no one has a right to complain. I can still laugh and jest and enjoy the society of my friends, though not with the same heart as formerly. And I see the world with different eyes. I do not think I should be doing you a kindness in accepting you, because you would get a different wife from the one you want to take. Then as to the children, I could be kind to them; but I do not feel any yearning to be a mother to anybody's children; and in this also I feel I could not come up to the mark.

Therefore, my dear old friend, I decline your offer with thanks. I cannot be Lady Hamilton because I am not the person you suppose—a case of mistaken identity. As a proof, the Helen who now refuses to share your wealth and fame, would once have accepted poverty with you.—Believe me now and always, your true friend,

HELEN CHALLONER.

Sir Reginald Hamilton to Miss Challoner.

MY DEAR HELEN,—Your arguments against late marriages—I object to you calling them *elderly* marriages—are very ingenious and convincing. As a general rule they may be risky. But there are exceptions to all rules; I have known myself not a few happy unions contracted after the romance of youth was past; and I am quite convinced that I could make you happy. I should not be exacting or curtail your freedom; your time would be your own. I should respect your hours of study and not bounce in upon you at unseasonable moments, when you were in the midst of a tangled plot. (I know you write novels under a *nom de plume*.) I hope there is no smoky chimney in my house, but if there should be I should carefully abstain from mentioning it; I should not bore you with too much sentiment, and I should endeavour to support with equanimity your satirical sallies.

Can I promise more? These are all negations it is true; but if there is any positive virtue you would like me to practise, pray name it, and I shall endeavour to meet your wishes. If you think me selfish in wishing to transfer my dearest friend from her own hearth to mine you must remember that I have not the advantages the

Frenchman enjoyed : I cannot spend my evenings with you. I must have you altogether or resign you altogether. This last I am not going to do without a struggle.

Now, dear Helen, let me conclude with one serious word. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I think I can read between the lines and see some heavier objection in your mind than the flimsy ones you advance. You talk delicately of the changes in yourself, but you really fear changes in me which might not be agreeable to you. Well, I am not afraid to meet your searching eye. I am an older and a sadder man than when we parted. I have outlived some of my enthusiasms—some of my fads as my friends called them—but I have not, I dare affirm, deteriorated morally. I have never betrayed a friend, deceived a woman, or tried to gain advancement by disparaging a rival. I am in point of fact the same Reginald you and Walter used to know and trust. You may trust me now, Helen. Do not fear to lay your hand in mine and commit your future to my care.

A thousand thanks for the photograph ; it brought a flood of tender memories with it. How little you seem changed !—Always your devoted friend,

REGINALD HAMILTON.

Miss Challoner to Sir R. Hamilton.

You quite mis-read the lines between, my dear Reginald ; I never for a moment doubted that you are the man of stainless honour whom I had known for years. Trust you? Certainly I could trust you more than any man I have ever known. I am grieved to have unintentionally hurt you. I thought I had made it clear that it was on general and impersonal grounds that I objected. Are you satisfied? Let us be friends as of old then, and to begin, tell me about the children. When I go to England next summer we shall meet I hope, and have a long talk about old days and old friends that are no more.

In the meantime let me have your views on things ; the important, the burning questions of the day. You have not, I hope, lost your interest in home affairs. You say you have outlived some of your enthusiasms. Which? I await with impatience your reply to these questions.—Yours affectionately,

HELEN CHALLONER.

II.

It was a bright Italian winter day, and Helen Challoner stood on the highest point of S. Miniato over the cemetery, and looked down on the beautiful city in the valley—the green Arno gleaming through the heart of it—encircled by hills, with its grand old church towers, the bells of which were pealing sweetly in the clear cold air, for it

was Christmas Eve, and on the vigil of a festival the bells ring half the day.

The sky was serenely blue, and not a cloud of smoke from the chimneys of the town dimmed her view as she looked beyond it to Fiesole and Monte Morello. Her glance swept from the little Montoliveto on her left to the Vallombrosa Mountains on her right, and then fell on the intervening slopes covered with olives which divided her from the city that lay below in its peaceful beauty. Miss Challoner said to herself that it would cost her a bitter pang if she were called on to abandon this her adopted city, the home of Art, which had so many attractions for her, the very walls of which she had learned to love.

"But I am not called on to give it up; I have said I would not," she murmured, to quiet the unaccountable sadness of her heart on this bright day when her surroundings seemed so cheerful.

Miss Challoner took her way home by the long flights of steps down Monte alle Croci. She ran down some of the steps, and even on level ground walked faster than was the mode in Florence. In the rhythmic motion of her light firm tread there was an easy grace and dignity which expressed a perfect self-reliance. She wore a costume of dark-green cashmere mixed with velvet, a velvet bonnet of the same, the sombre olive hue being enlivened by slight trimming of gold braid on both dress and bonnet. A little cape of sable fur and muff of the same completed her simple, elegant attire.

She entered the city by the gate of S. Miniato, crossed the first bridge she came to, and in a few minutes found herself in the old church of S. Croce among the tombs of the illustrious dead.

Being Christmas Eve there were more worshippers than usual at the afternoon service, but the large church was still more than half empty. Miss Challoner did not approach the altar or take any visible part in the worship. She passed up the right side and sat down in a quiet shaded spot by the wall and untied her fur. Here she abandoned herself to a reverie while the priests droned forth their monotonous chaunt.

Christmas with its recurring memories was the most melancholy time of all the year to Helen. A terrible misfortune had befallen her at this season: her only brother to whom she was devoutly attached was killed from a fall off his horse three days before Christmas. That was a great many years ago, but the season brought it all back to her, and other troubles as well. She refused to acknowledge this, and always dined gaily at the house of some friend on the great festival. It was Christmas Eve that was so difficult to get over.

Helen leaned her head against Alfieri's monument by Canova, her delicate profile standing out on the white marble as if it were carved in high relief. But the bright colour that her walk had brought to her cheeks and the green velvet bonnet did not lend themselves to that illusion.

She was a very handsome woman, but her best points did not show so well in out-of-door dress, for her figure was more perfect than her face, and her greatest beauty was the shape and pose of her head, which was exquisite. Her dark hair grew rather low on her forehead, and was brought softly back in little rippling wavelets; but the forehead itself was not low or round; it rose straight from the dark delicately-pencilled brows which projected slightly over deep-set eyes. These last were not large nor full, but lively, keen and penetrating, in colour a brown hazel. Her nose and mouth were finely and delicately modelled; her complexion white, slightly tinted with wild rose blush. Her figure was statuesque and rather above the medium height.

Altogether she was an object better worth looking at than some of the marble muses who presided over the tombs of the poets.

When she had rested, or thought out her problem, she picked up her little umbrella and took her way homewards.

This solitary self-sufficing lady, who had many friends who would have been enchanted to have her under their roof, chose to live alone in a little apartment on the third floor of an old palace, which was divided into six or seven different quarters.

She opened the door with a latch-key, and found her maid sitting by the hall-stove sewing—the cold aspect of her bedroom, and the infinitesimal proportions of the kitchen which was generally held in possession by the cook, obliging her to make a sitting-room of this cheerful apartment, which was well-lighted from the roof. She was a middle-aged widow of neat appearance, and what the Italians call *festosa* manners—that is, she made a fuss about any one she liked, and especially about her mistress, whom she thought a peerless creature.

Miss Challoner's Irish nature responded to the Italian domestic's affectionate manners; it bored her sometimes, it is true, to listen to her talk, but she did not repel her. She smiled brightly when asked if she had had a pleasant walk and "good diversion," and asked for her tea, remarking that it was very cold.

She felt a little glow of comfort, altogether materialistic, when she entered her snug *salotto*, and found a blazing wood fire, a bright copper kettle singing on the hearth, and a tiny two-storeyed tea-table placed near it. It was a pleasant change from the piercing north wind which swept down from the Apennines and raked the streets. At the chilly hour of a winter afternoon a bright fire and tea-table have charms to soothe the female mind, even though the cheering cup is to be taken in solitude.

While Miss Challoner passed under a curtain, and presumably through a door beside the fireplace to her chamber to remove her muffling, we can take a glance at her sitting-room.

It was a quaint long room, with a low vaulted ceiling, prettily frescoed. It had no less than four doors, after the Italian fashion:

one that entered from the hall, one at each end of the room, leading respectively to her chamber and studio, and a half glass door that opened upon a terrace which commanded a splendid view, and which was adorned with creepers and various plants. In summer all these doors made delightful draughts, and in winter they were draped with heavy crimson curtains.

At the end of the room, opposite the fire, there was a large well-filled bookcase of carved wood, beside it a pedestal with a marble bust; another bust stood on a cabinet between the window and the glass door, and the opposite wall was covered with oil-paintings, water-colours, etchings, medallions in marble, etc., most of which were presents from artist friends. Round some of the works of art drapery was gracefully arranged.

A writing-table stood between the fire and the window, a guitar and mandoline hung on the wall at each side of the fire-place. The furniture was well selected to harmonise with the quaint old-fashioned aspect of the room. There were some fresh flowers about, and some pretty curious objects, but there was no overloading of ornament, and the whole had an air of unpretentious elegance and comfort.

The owner of this tasteful abode did not seem out of keeping with her surroundings, though she would not have been out of place in a palace.

Helen Challoner was one of those women whose beauty seems imperishable. It was of that fine intellectual type which does not depend on the bloom and freshness of youth; but the bloom and freshness still remained, as well as the perfect proportions of her slender figure. She covered the tea-pot with an embroidered cosy, seated herself in an easy-chair, and put two small feet encased in black velvet shoes on a footstool by the fender. Then she leaned back and took a book off her writing-table, opened it, and found therein an old photograph, which she looked at for some time. She put it back and closed the book abruptly.

"He will write no more. If I will not marry him he will have none of my friendship. So like a man. And poets are not very different from other men. I have convinced him just as he had *almost* convinced me. What a clever pair!" she laughed, and her laugh was like her voice, clear and dulcet, but it had a bitter ring in it.

Helen Challoner was a woman who could never bear to give way to emotion. She had a masculine horror of tears from her early youth; no one had ever seen her weep after she was grown up. Though warm-hearted and affectionate in her happy hours, in time of affliction she hid herself from her friends until she could see them with composure.

The first grief of her life which cut deep in her heart was such as a proud girl would naturally seek to conceal, and she had concealed it most effectually. After five years of intimate intercourse with her brother's college friend, a man of uncommon gifts, to whom she felt

drawn by an intense sympathy, to whose brilliant intellect and noble character she felt her whole nature subject, she was called upon to part from him without the consolation of one word of love, compelled to meet him daily before his departure, and to regulate her expressions of regret in accordance with the friendship he professed. She played her part well, with what suffering no one suspected.

A year after she met the crushing blow of her brother's death with what seemed a stoic calm. Attending her mother in a dangerous illness, she refused to see any friend, and it was only in the silent watches of the night, when her unhappy patient slept, that she gave way to the agony of grief that oppressed her. She retired to an ante-room, where she wept low, and breathed his name softly to the night winds moaning through the trees, as she stood at the open window gazing into the dark grove.

"Walter, Walter! Oh, my brother, how shall I live a long life without you? What is there now worth living for? Why could not I die instead of you, my darling? I was so unhappy, and your life was bright and full of promise. Oh, Walter, where are you? If you can, send me a sign of comfort in my dreams!"

So the poor girl raved in her loneliness. Her young heart was bursting with grief, and it should have some outlet. She had received more than one letter from Reginald Hamilton after the sad news of Walter's death reached him in India, expressive of deep grief, sympathy, and consolation. She answered them, and then came a little poem full of pathos and tender brotherly sympathy.

Time heals all wounds, but the scar remains. Helen soon resumed her usual life, and was outwardly the same Helen as before; only her heart felt the difference.

When her mourning was over she went into society as formerly, and seemed just as bright and charming as ever. She had good offers of marriage which she refused, and hosts of admirers everywhere she went, with whom she amused herself, laughing at their sufferings, real or assumed.

Helen had a passion for literature from her youth, and began to practise writing at a very early period. Her travels in foreign countries with her parents after the estate had been sold, had enlarged her outlook, and time had improved and mellowed her sharp lively style, so that it had become very taking with editors. She wrote under a *nom de plume*, and jealously guarded her secret.

When she lost her parents in Germany, she selected Florence as a residence, induced by her love of art and the pleasant memories she retained of a former visit. She was a versatile creature, full of talent and energy. Her long, slender supple fingers were always busy with something. She played the guitar and mandoline with taste; but the most congenial work which she had taken up since her residence in Florence was modelling. When she first entered a sculptor's studio and asked for instruction she meant it as a recreation; but her

master's encouragement awakened her ambition, and she made such progress as delighted her master, a very clever man with a slight streak of genius. She had now been more than eight years at work, studying "*sul serio*" as her master told her, with great pleasure to herself, but no gain except to her teacher and her models. In fact she found her taste for sculpture a costly one owing to the expensive nature of the materials employed.

III.

HELEN sat in her easy-chair on that cold Christmas Eve, leaving her tea untouched and gazing into the fire for a brief space. Then, as if seeing some unpleasing vision there, she pressed her slim white hand on her eyes. At that moment a knock came to the door, which was opened the instant after, and behind the *portière* she heard a voice saying in Italian to the maid:—

"Thanks, I can announce myself. I am a friend of the Signorina." The voice sounded like a far-off echo down the corridors of time.

In an instant, a slight middle-aged gentleman entered, letting fall the curtain behind him. He was a man of middle height, very spare, with brownish grey hair, brownish grey moustache, and brownish grey face, which had a dried up "wilted" look, as if scorched by a burning sun. His lofty bald forehead was furrowed with thought and care, and there was a deep line at each side of his mouth. His hands and feet were small, and he had a certain air of distinction as he stood still for a moment, quietly holding his hat in a thin brown hand.

Helen rose slowly from her seat, letting her book slide from her lap to the carpet, and stood still as a statue gazing at him. When he approached her and said "Helen!" she gave him her hand mechanically; but it was not till she felt the warm pressure of his, and looked into the calm depths of his dark grey eyes—the only feature which time had left untouched—that she recovered sufficiently from the shock of his sudden appearance to give him a conventional greeting.

"Reginald, I am so glad to see you!" she said while her breath came quick and fast, and the colour which had fled from her face at the first sound of his voice returned in a rush.

"Thank you," he answered briefly and pressed her hand to his lips.

"This is a surprise; you did not say you were coming to Florence."

"No, I did not know when I last wrote; that is to say, I had not decided to come so soon. I arrived this morning."

Their manner was as quiet as if they had parted six months ago, but there was a thrill of restrained emotion in the voices of both. While they were speaking, each was searching the face of the other for the long-lost friend. Sir Reginald thought Helen marvellously young and handsome; but the fierce Eastern sun, combined with care and trouble, had wrought such a change in him that except for his

noble forehead and peculiar eyes—dark grey with large pupils intermingling with the iris, and shaded by long dark lashes—she would not have recognized him.

"You find me greatly changed," he said with a sad sweet smile, showing a slight gleam of regular white teeth under the grey moustache.

"I was prepared for that ; I am changed too," replied Helen.

"Very little, in appearance."

He was still holding her hand and scanning her face. With a little nervous laugh she withdrew her hand and waved him to a chair.

"Let us have a cup of tea and we can talk after. How cold it is !"

She rang the bell, and Gigia brought fresh supplies of everything. While Helen busied herself with the teacups, Sir Reginald watched her every movement ; but when she had settled down to take her tea he looked round the room and noted its contents ; the marble busts especially seemed to attract his attention.

"You have a charming little nest here, Helen. Do you live quite alone?"

"Yes ; I have lived here for about eight years. But in these old palaces we have neighbours under the roof with us."

"I have to congratulate you, my dear friend, on your successes, literary and artistic. You have created your own world. And you like Florence very much?"

"Better than any city I have ever lived in ; it satisfies all my modest requirements. Let me give you another cup of tea."

"Thanks. It is a charming place indeed, even in its present wintry aspect. It seems independent of weather or season. But still—to live in exile from your native land !"

"You have lived in worse exile from your native land—at least I should imagine so," retorted Helen.

"Oh, but with the hope of returning. I felt it to be an exile all the while."

"You still care for England and Ireland?" asked Helen.

"That is a strange question from you. Of course I do. My heart is not so withered up as my face. But, Helen, when love of your country is still alive, why do you choose to remain—an absentee?"

"What good can I do now the old place is gone? If I owned an acre of ground it would be different. It would be almost painful to me to return to where we were once 'lords of the soil.' What good could I do?"

"What good? You have talents. You could have influence in society—influence with the people."

"But I have lost my place there, and have made me a little niche here. You see, Reginald, I have got used to Florence, whose interests are of the past and therefore conducive to calm. And then you forget that I am a mere woman as Mrs. Micawber said, and do

everything in fits and starts. But I am not an idle woman, and I am not a woman without a country. In fact I have three. I have never lost my sympathetic interest in Ireland, my respectful interest in England; I have thrilled over Italy—her beauty, her genius, her struggles for liberty—and I rejoice in her success. But our sympathies have limitations, and when you are divided between three nationalities a time comes when you cease to thrill."

Miss Challoner said this in her old ironical vein, her beautiful little head thrown back against her easy-chair. The wintry sun had gone down and the room was growing dusky, but the flames of the blazing wood danced upon the wall, illuminated the pictures, and lit up Helen's graceful form and smiling, upturned face. The curve of her milk-white throat, the sweep of dark wavy hair above the delicate little ear, the slim white hand which played restlessly with her chain—how familiar all these seemed to Sir Reginald! He almost cheated himself into the belief that the great gap of time had been bridged over, and this was the same laughing, sparkling girl he had known in his youth.

He was standing with his back partly to the fire, his face in shade, so that Helen could not see how he looked. A short silence ensued, which he presently broke with a singular question:

"I wish you would explain me something, Helen, if you do not think it an indiscreet question from an old friend. You have had good offers: why did you never marry?"

Helen said inwardly: "And you can ask me that, Reginald Hamilton!" while her heart gave an indignant throb. Aloud she said with philosophic coolness:

"I think marriage is good only when one is driven to it by some imperious necessity; that is, the need of love, or the sense of dependence, the need of some one to lean upon which many women feel so strongly. This necessity did not exist for me. I always felt I could stand alone. Love did not come in to blind me to the defects of my suitors. I saw the ass's ears without any glamour on my eyes, and felt no desire to stick musk roses in them."

"And—did you meet no one who answered to your ideal?" asked Sir Reginald with deep interest.

She shook her head.

"In youth my ideal had been formed on too high a model. I could not come down."

Helen met the poet's earnest eyes without any coquettish blush or lowering of her lids. He had not lived forty-three years in the world and achieved greatness without having received his share of adulation and admiration, and he had become indifferent to it. But those simple words which Helen spoke of her former self, as if it were some far-off forgotten history, "In my youth my ideal had been formed on too high a model," made the blood tingle in his pale brown cheeks and brought a new light into his dark grey eyes. His bald temples throbbed. After a pause he spoke:

"Perhaps you were blind in the days of your inexperienced youth, and see with different eyes now."

The quiet modest tone in which he said this touched some sensitive chord in Helen's heart. She could not bear to wound the feelings—or at least the pride—of the sad-eyed poet.

"No, Reginald, I think now as I thought then. You are first in my esteem—always have been." She gave him her hand with more cordiality than she had yet shown him. He pressed it fervently to his lips.

"I should have known the touch of this dear hand had I been blind, like the old bard Carolan who recognised his lady after twenty years' absence by the touch of her hand. You will laugh at that perhaps. Does it seem impossible?"

"All things are possible to a poet," replied Helen with a laugh. She would have withdrawn her hand, for she felt she could not repel him while he held it in his warm clasp. Banter she had always found an effective weapon with an importunate lover; it acted like a cold douche on the tender passion. But she felt powerless to jest since he had possessed himself of her hand. Sir Reginald perceived his advantage.

"Helen," he said in a voice full of feeling, "I always knew you had a heart in spite of your determination to conceal it. In one thing only you succeeded in blinding me, but that was a cruel—a fatal deception."

"Deception, Sir Reginald?"

She snatched her hand from his.

"Forgive me—I can call it by no other name. You must have known how I felt, and you took care to make me understand that your friendship was all that I might ever hope to aspire to. Oh, Helen, what a fate your pride consigned me to! And you—" he continued with emotion, "it is no presumption for me to say it now—you might have had a happier and fuller life had you not cased your heart in an armour of steel. When I think of the troubles you have had to face alone when I might have shared the burden—and what I have suffered—I cannot refrain from reproaching your pride."

"My pride, Reginald, was that of any self-respecting girl. I did not know that you cared for me more than you cared for Walter. Or if, like a foolish girl, I did sometimes dream it, I was ashamed and angry with myself; I thought your northern prudence would prevent you making an undesirable marriage; for our fortunes were on the wane."

"And what were mine? A poor young man with his own way to make in the world, it might well have been considered presumption in me if I had dared to open my heart without some encouragement."

"Well, we both made a mistake—and we have had reason to regret it," Helen replied with unusual gentleness, but still keeping her emotion well under. She had grown pale when Sir Reginald began his charge, but she remained calm. "I am sorry, believe me, for your sake as well as my own. You have twice spoken of suffering which you have undergone. To what did you allude?"

"Need you ask? My marriage turned out most unhappy—unsuitability of mind and character. I will not blame my wife; it was not her fault; she could not help herself. She did not suit me; there was only one woman in the world who would have suited me. I did not suit her; she did not sympathise with my pursuits, she cared nothing for poetry. These elements of discord would have been sufficient—but jealousy was added. Soon after our marriage she found in my absence in my drawer, among other little souvenirs, your miniature which you gave me at parting. She would not believe that it was all that remained to me of a friend I was never more to see. Henceforth foul suspicion haunted my life. Thank heaven I was able to fulfil my duty to the end. Enough. I have said I should not open this page of my history. I have been unhappy. What then? Others have been equally so. It is the common lot. But when I think of what might have been—that nothing stood between us two but pride, I think pride the most hateful of sins."

Sir Reginald approached Helen while he was speaking and his toe touched something on the carpet. He stooped and picked up a handsome copy of Tennyson, which he had given her when he was going away, and in it was his own photograph. He closed the book and laid it gently on the table. Then he drew a chair to her side, and seating himself, took the hand that lay in her lap.

"Helen," he said tenderly, "you see I am but the wreck of what I once was. But my heart, believe me, is not dead! your image has been enshrined in its innermost depths for nearly twenty years—for I loved you from a boy—when you were not yet sixteen. All that is left of my life—and I feel what a poor offering it is—shall be dedicated to your happiness. This dear hand must and shall be mine. Stay—do not answer me yet. Listen! I have revisited Ireland, having heard that your father's property was to be sold, and have purchased it for half its original value. I am going to settle in Slievemoyle and see what I can do for the people."

"Reginald, dear Reginald! did you do this for my sake?" cried Helen, quite overcome, her bright eyes glistening as she pressed his hand in both of hers.

"For your sake, my queen, but not altogether for your sake. Slievemoyle in all its desolation is a dear and sacred place to me for the memories it holds. Can I forget your good father whose hospitable doors were always open to me? Or your sweet mother who received the orphan boy with maternal kindness? Or my best friend Walter who was really 'more than my brothers were to me?' Do you remember the walks and rides that we three used to have together? How we used to scramble over the rocks when a storm was coming until the spray of the Atlantic drenched us; and what delightful boating excursions! Returning at sunset in a calm sea we often let the boat drift while we sang or recited poetry. Those were the sweetest and happiest moments I have ever known. It was in those

scenes that I drew my first inspiration and felt the poet within me start into life.

"When I lately stood on the hill above the house and listened to the sobbing of the wind through the wood, and felt the briny blast blowing on my face, the past fifteen years seemed blotted out—I felt strength and hope revive in me, and I knew that life was still worth the living if I chose to make it so."

Tears to which Helen had long been a stranger gathered slowly in her eyes while her lover was speaking—and now one rolled down her pale cheek and fell on Sir Reginald's hand. She was silently struggling with her emotion which had at last overmastered her, and revenged itself for being so long oppressed. She bent her head and swept away her tears, but others followed, and it seemed as if she should have to leave the room to recover her composure. But at the first movement she made to rise he was on his feet, and when she would have passed him he laid his hand on her arm and held her back; then taking her other hand he gently put her back in her chair. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and wept silently for a few minutes. She was fairly conquered. When she looked up again and met her lover's gaze, her eyes were still moist, and her whole manner so softened and subdued that it added a fresh charm to her beauty and made her look several years younger. What had become of her theories? She put her hand to her brow in thought.

"What is it, dearest?" asked Sir Reginald.

"I almost doubt my own identity; I can hardly believe it true that I should have promised; but I have not promised!"

"No, my wild sweet briary rose, you have promised nothing; you are still free. But you will be better than your word; you always were. You will not leave me to cope with all the difficulties of Slievemoyle single-handed, if it were only for the sake of the people who remember you so well? You will make the sacrifice of giving up your beautiful city, and your charming home, and the liberty which has grown dear to you, to be the companion of a grey, sad old man in a wild country, in an inclement climate, to take an interest in his children and his tenants?"

"How black you draw the picture! One would suppose that it was a hard fate to return to my old home and country, and with you. Well, whatever it may be, I accept it."

She gave him her hand, which he kissed repeatedly.

"I will do my best for the children. *Your* children must be nice. But I am not going into raptures over the joy of taking care of them, not till I know them. Let us have no pretences, and do not think you are bound to play the *rôle* of lover to this old girl because she happens to suit you for a wife. Ours is a marriage of friendship, and a marriage of friendship between two sensible middle-aged people can be a very happy one."

"All right," said Sir Reginald, with that sweet smile of his, in

which the lines about the mouth disappeared, and his white teeth gleamed under the grey moustache, "I shall not bore you with sentiment. I have said I am ready to take you on your own terms, let them be as matter-of-fact as you please. We can settle some business matters."

He drew her chair to the fire, placed his own opposite, and threw a few pine cones into the blaze.

"Have you any requests to make, any special arrangements with regard to our wedding?"

"None."

"How soon may it be; could you be ready by the first of February?"

"Hardly; but I shall try to get to London as soon as possible when I have disposed of my little belongings."

"The things you care for must be brought home to furnish a Florence room as your studio—the room with the balcony, at the back of the house. When you are dull or sad you can retire and work a little, or play the guitar."

"What a happy idea, Reginald. I shall settle affairs here as soon as possible, and go to London, where I shall have my trousseau prepared. I should like the wedding to be a quiet one, no veil or orange-blossoms; a silver-grey plush dress and bonnet will just suit my age."

"I have nothing to say against the grey plush, I like quiet weddings, but as to your age, why, you look twenty-five. And where would you like to go for the—a—the wedding journey?"

"Slievemoyle, of course. That is, if it be agreeable to you, dear Reginald."

"It is the dearest wish of my heart to see you there once more. In its present state it is not an ideal home to bring a bride to, but we are sensible people, and will set to work directly to renovate."

"Oh, what a pleasure that will be!" cried Helen, with a burst of girlish joy, "and what a fairy prince you are, Reginald." And she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

He smiled back at her, and said, "Hark to the Ave Maria! Am I supposed to go away now, or may I sit another half-hour? You told me a lady was more likely to be uniformly amiable at her own fireside than at her husband's. Let me enjoy the sunshine while I may."

She nodded, smiling, and gazed into the fire without speaking.

"What are you thinking of, my queen?"

"I was thinking how nice it would be to have the children home at Easter, and let them run wild with the goats for a while. They delight in confusion and disorder, and it will do them good."

Sir Reginald's face became radiant. He rose, and with a sudden swift movement caught Helen from her chair, and pressed her to his heart with ardour. She, taken by surprise, yielded to his embrace, and when his lips sought hers she willingly gave him her first kiss of

love. She had had more lovers than most pretty women could boast of, but no man had ever received the smallest favour from her till now. In the bitterness of disappointment they had called her cold, hard, mocking, and she had liked that reputation. But now her heart thrilled like a girl with maiden pride as she laid her hand on Sir Reginald's shoulder, and looking into his face, said :

"I have been true to you, Reginald Hamilton—true as steel."

"I know it, unworthy that I am."

"And yet you dared to ask me why I had not married some fox-hunting squire, some insipid sprig of nobility, or a dogmatic, pig-headed parson."

"Forgive me, my love ; I only wanted to hear your explanation of the phenomenon. I had to feel my way, for you are not an easy conquest. You said let us have no pretences ; I have made none ; it is you who make pretences, dear. Suppose you had been my wife for fifteen years would you cease to love me now because I am no longer young ? No. Why then should it seem ridiculous if we should marry for affection like other people ? Away with pretences ! You have promised me your hand because your heart is mine—has always been ; I know it now."

"My heart stood still when I heard your voice," said Helen ; "and when you appeared did I look as if I had seen a ghost ?"

"Quite so. But surely you expected me to come, Helen ? The man is an ass who gives in in such a case without a struggle. I resolved to storm you in your own citadel. I had the unexpected delight of seeing you in S. Croce to-day, and followed you home after the manner of your Italian adorers. I came, I saw, I conquered. I have shown you that at forty-three a man has still a right to marry for love, and I mean to be as affectionate as I please." Sir Reginald wound up with his charming smile, and Helen laughed ; a soft happy laugh—it had lost the bitter ring.

"Well, my king, I hope you will be a generous victor, and remember the promises you made before I capitulated."

"I promised to *refrain* from mentioning smoky chimneys, but I should like you to ask me to *do* something. Would you like a trip to Italy in the spring ?"

"Perhaps ; but I must consider about my Bill of Rights. When you entered the room and took my hand I felt it was all up with me, and that when you went away I should no longer belong to myself."

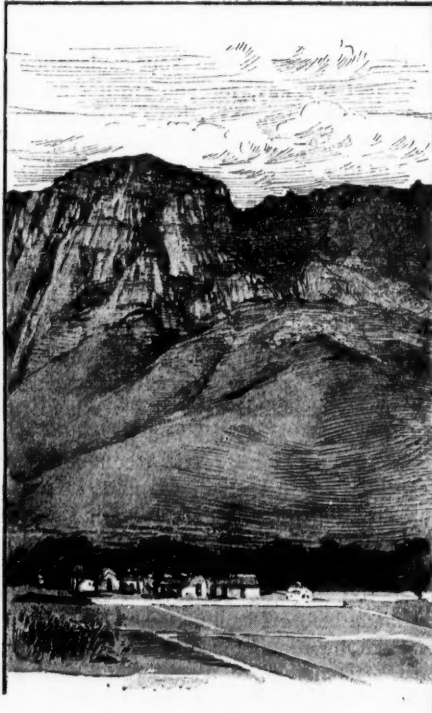
Sir Reginald smiled his sweetest smile, and said :

"Shall I confess it ? I had a similar conviction !"

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," "IN THE LOTUS LAND," ETC., ETC.

AT SEA. *April, 1893.*



STELLENBOSCH.

CARE AMICE,—
Our philanthropic and original driver, you will remember, who safely conducted us round the wonderful Victoria Road, plucked us branches of the silver tree, and unduly compassionated the gipsy-woman, wished to repeat his adventure a second time. This was impossible because we had formed plans for our next and last day for the present in Cape Town; we had other duties and pleasures in hand.

Having received an introduction to Mr. N. the minister of the Reformed Dutch Church, and therefore a descendant of the Boers, if not still one of them himself, we wished to make use of it. And

I will at once say that if all the Boers in South Africa in any way resemble Mr. N. in mind and disposition, the country is fortunate in possessing them, and cannot possess too many of them.

Our visit would take us to Stellenbosch, about an hour's journey from Cape Town. It had been described to us as an old Dutch settlement—one of the oldest in the Colony; and imagination immediately conjured up quaint streets and gabled houses, and the various picturesque accompaniments of the old towns of our favourite Holland. Of course nothing was further from the fact.

We started by an early train, passing a second time over some portions of the line we had traversed the previous day. As we left the town behind us, it lay an immense area of white house upon the plain, under the shadow of the great Table Mountain. Making way, we soon found ourselves in the country, the horizon here and there bounded by distant chains of hills, many of them very peculiar in form, and unlike anything seen in our own mountainous countries of Europe. The hills of South Africa at once give it a very distinctive and characteristic appearance.

On each side of the line stretched wide cultivated plains, occasionally varied by low trees and a good deal of undergrowth. Farm-houses were dotted about, surrounded by orchards and fields that evidently would presently spring up into grain. It is only autumn here, you will remember, though to our new experience it is curious to talk of autumn in the month of April; and winter has to be passed before the fruit and grain-bearing time comes round again. The farm-houses are very effective, with their dazzling white walls and jet black roofs, presenting the strongest possible contrast to the surrounding scenery, and standing out vividly under the blue and brilliant sky. They seem the very embodiment of peace and repose, and apparently possess all the cleanliness and neatness said to be the peculiar attributes of the Dutch; virtues which may possibly distinguish the Boers, but most certainly are not universal in Holland, the mother country.

There was a certain amount of uncultivated land amidst all the luxuriance; land that seemed never to have known pruning-hook or ploughshare; arid sandy wastes covered with undergrowth which is here called Karroo, and stunted trees that seemed to serve no purpose but to give shelter to the birds: the birds of South Africa, that are not musical and sweet singing, but often of gorgeous plumage, flashing about in the air like magnificent pieces of detached rainbow. At the few railway stations they hawked delicious-looking fruit artistically piled in small baskets, and for which very modest sums were asked.

The train made way slowly, according to the custom of South African trains. In this they *do* resemble the Dutch; loitering long, apparently for no earthly purpose but to try the patience of the passengers. The system, like everything else South African, is yet in childhood. The day will come when new and better lines will be laid, and trains will shoot through endless tracks at the rate of sixty miles an hour, annihilating time and space. At this moment South Africa presents, to all intents and purposes, the appearance of a vast uninhabited country with boundless resources. In certain spots, such as Cape Town, the people congregate; the busy hives of this vast region; but for the most part South Africa is waiting its population and development.

In due time we reached Stellenbosch.

The town itself is quite a mile or a mile and a half from the station, and we found ourselves in the midst of a smiling plain, backed by wonderful mountains, remarkable and picturesque in form. They towered into the sky, with sharp peaks and jagged outlines, that reminded one a little of the dolomite mountains of the Tyrol; possibly the result of some tremendous upheaval of nature in the far-off time when the earth and man were as yet unknown to each other.

The moment we left the station we somehow felt at home; in a terrestrial paradise. Not that I wish to suggest that we considered ourselves angels, or anything more closely allied to angels than the French *ange sans g.* But there is an indescribable charm about Stellenbosch which at once asserts itself, and people ought to grow into angels here. It lies in the aspect of the place, the very air you breathe. At once you are in the midst of strange beauty. The grandeur of those mountains is far more striking even than the tremendous mass of Table Mountain, the Devil's Peak and Lion's Head. The town is invisible as yet, but the long rough road before you must lead to it in time—rough only in comparison with a European macadamised roadway, but much more picturesque and primitive than that modern invention. On either side the road were stretches of sandy plain covered with green heather growth, and hillocks which might have been the graves of giants, and trees that did not bear fruit, but were very charming nevertheless; and small ponds of water in which armies of frogs were making unearthly noises, possibly going through political battles in frogland. Passing one of the ponds—oh wonderful surprise and glory of glories—we found a blue lotus flower.

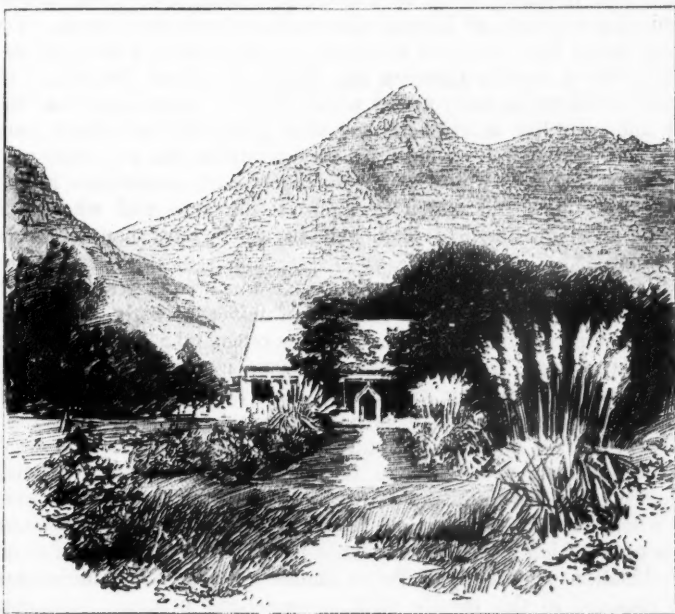
Can you imagine how for a single moment my heart ceased to beat, and my thoughts, with a mental mesmerism greater than earthly magic, flew off to days that are gone—charming days under the brilliant skies of the Lotus Land, where we lived in an atmosphere sacred to a past world? What visions were conjured up by this one small flower: for it blossomed in solitary beauty as if it had suddenly sprung up for our special delight. Visions of a flashing sunlit Nile; of moonlit Pyramids steeped in the solemn silence of midnight, the solitude of endless plains; of wonderful mosques; of the tombs of the Caliphs, where we spent those magic hours under the moonbeams; and of those charming evenings when you exercised all the witchcraft at your command, and our friendship daily grew strong and firm.

We would have plucked and carried away this wonderful solitary lotus flower, but it was out of reach, and we had to leave it to blossom in its earthly paradise.

We went on, ever before us those wonderful mountains with their splendid outlines. If all South Africa equalled this, then, after all, we should be repaid for our voyage across the ocean and the misery of passing through the Tropics. True, there were no ancient ruins or architectural glories—such as those conjured up by the solitary

lotus flower—but amidst this wonderful expanse and grandeur of nature we could for once dispense with those mighty evidences of man's labour and skill.

After walking for some time through all this beauty, we reached the commencement of Stellenbosch proper, and found it very different from anything we had anticipated. "An old Dutch town; perhaps the oldest settlement in Cape Colony," we had heard. And we had thought of Gouda, of Dordrecht, the Dead Cities of the Zuyder Zee—Hoorn and Monnekendam, with their quaint and curious architectural features; of more distant Friesland, with its handsome women and



ON THE VICTORIA DRIVE.

wonderful costumes. All this was a delusion. It did a little resemble such villages as Broek, with its tiny whitewashed houses, and tree-lined roads running parallel with a broad canal: but this was its only likeness to Holland—and here the canal was absent.

The place certainly looked pretty and rustic, but not Dutch-like. We first found a long row of white houses, which formed the business part of the town; the shops and modest hotels; all facing a wide plain, where soldiers may exercise, or the youth of Stellenbosch go in for Olympian games, or fairs and circuses encamp. This plain had not the beauty of the plains lying between the town and station. The whitewashed houses did not look very clean or tempting, as far

as one could judge from a passing glimpse of the interiors. At many an open door stood a cage with the small green parrot so often seen in South Africa: beautiful birds, who seem gifted with a sense of humour, so apposite are their remarks, so solemn their look, as if they quite understood all that was going on, and were much wiser than their betters.

At right angles with this were the roads leading to the upper part of the town, in which our direction lay. Wide roads lined with trees, and white houses standing far back at intervals, apparently much better kept than the shops and the inns. Houses, also with whitewashed walls and thatched roofs, all looking like overgrown cottages, and reminding one more of French villages than of anything Dutch. Yet many Boers live here, and one hears a great deal of Dutch spoken. There was a certain lightness and brightness about the place, to which a brilliant blue sky added all its charm. Indeed, given a blue sky and sparkling atmosphere, and what place will not charm you? One felt that life here must be very primitive but very pleasant; full of a simplicity which takes one back many generations in the world's history; but which is after all the true and wholesome life we were intended to lead, and in which most happiness will be found.

We turned into one of these wide roads, which was utterly deserted. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of this apparently abandoned village. One wondered what had become of the inhabitants and what they were doing. Yet it is a place of some importance. It has its university; and students come to it from all parts of the Colony. Therefore many professors have here taken up their abode, and form a small, learned, and very pleasant society.

Our introduction was to Mr. N., minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. We were not sure of our way, yet no one crossed our path of whom to inquire. But at the upper part of the road we came to a house which looked a formidable government office; one of those combinations apparently of Police Station—if such an institution can be required in this earthly paradise—receiving of taxes, registering of births, marriages and deaths, and other needs of the parish, domestic, legal and political. No sound was audible excepting the loud ticking of no doubt a very Dutchlike but unseen clock, and the soothing murmurs of apparently some sleeping but equally unseen functionary. In a room to the right we found a very polite official dozing at a very severe-looking table, where no doubt the Parish Councils are held and business is transacted to the satisfaction of the Parish Councillors.

He roused himself at once and asked our pleasure.

"Pray excuse me, sirs," he said. "The day is warm, and I fell asleep and dreamed I was filling in a matrimonial certificate. Perhaps you require me to do something of the sort for you, sir," turning to me. "Or more probably for this gentleman," turning to

H., "as being the younger. Though I don't know. They say young fools are not the greatest of fools, though whether this is a quotation from Solomon or Shakespeare I have never been able to find out. Or perhaps," hurrying on, "you wish to see me in some other department of my duties—I am equally at your service. But I must tell you that I'm only a novice here—a *locum-tenens* for the day, and don't know much about the routine of the place. My friend, whom I represent, has gone to Cape Town, to a wedding—not his own. A lady came in just now for a Baptismal Certificate, and I unfortunately handed her a Burial. Very awkward!"

By this time we were a little alarmed, fearing the official mind had given way under stress of work or weather. Seizing the opportunity of a pause evidently meant for "breathing time," we assured this imaginative gentleman that we wanted nothing more important than to be directed to Mr. N.'s house. This was soon done. Sundry turnings to right and left would land us at our destination. We thanked our polite official, and as we passed through the hall, the Dutch clock seemed to tick more loudly than ever. Our "director" bowed us out, and we left him bowing upon the doorstep. The waving trees opposite seemed to bow back to him, as if they took the quiet attention to themselves.

The wide roads were so many avenues of magnificent trees, most of them oak-trees, and they give to Stellenbosch a unique and charming appearance. Detached houses stood far back behind them, each with its own large fruit and flower garden.

We passed Mr. N.'s church, a plain and simple building, after the fashion of most South African churches, and reached his house, which stood in a modest nook; whilst near it was a magnificent avenue of trees, evidently outside the precincts of the town, for no houses were visible on either side. Not very far from Mr. N.'s house was the college or school for younger boys, overshadowed by a splendid oak-tree 200 years old. We were fortunate enough to find the minister at home. The previous day or the day after would have found him absent, and we should have missed what I doubt not will prove one of our pleasantest days in South Africa. Events do not always fall out as happily.

Yes, Mr. N. was at home; would we trouble to walk in, was the answer to our inquiry. And forthwith we were ushered into a sitting-room, which proved at once that we were in South Africa, and not in England, from all the South African curiosities that were scattered about. Not exactly stuffed lions and tigers, for Mr. N. is a man of peace, but smaller and more gentle specimens of the productions of the colony.

Presently Mr. N. appeared. He had been working in his garden, and was dressed more as a son of Adam than as a minister, with blue blouse and large wooden shoes. This only proves how primitive and delightfully simple life still is out here. The apology

given for appearing in such a costume was not needed. It was a new experience to find so much wit and learning under this simple garb, and seemed to put us back a century or two in the world's history.

"You see," said Mr. N., "we all work in our own gardens here: those, at least, who have leisure: and it is only such men as the doctors, and a few of the professors who cannot devote a good deal of their time to the pursuit of Adam. To me it is both profit and recreation: it keeps me in health, and what I cannot actually do with my own hands, I superintend. We depend very much upon our gardens; and everything grows so abundantly that we cannot use a tithe of what we receive from mother earth. Whilst I dig and prune I think over next Sunday's sermon."

"But you live in a garden of Eden," I observed, "where sermons ought not to be wanted. The very trees that overshadow your roads are unrivalled, and would furnish oak enough to build an English navy."

"They may some day be wanted for a South African navy," returned Mr. N., laughing. "The day will come when we shall be a great and a rich country, exposed to neighbouring eyes. Envious glances will be cast upon us, and foreign powers may try to wrest our inheritance from us. Then our 'hearts of oak' must come in and do their duty."

"Heaven forbid that such trees should ever fall in such a cause!"

"As a minister of the gospel and a man of peace, I agree with you," returned Mr. N. "I hate all wars and rumours of wars; and the day will assuredly come when there will be an end of nation fighting against nation. I don't refer to the millennium, which is probably a distant event, but to an altered condition of the world. It is changing every day, though not in all things for the better, one must admit. But there will come a time when war will be impossible; the sword and the battle-axe must give place to the ploughshare and the pruning-hook."

"In that day the lion is to lie down with the lamb," I said. "But what remains of your South African lions are still very far from being tamed, if we may believe the records of travellers."

"You are getting on too fast," laughed the minister, "and have reached the millennium; but there is much to be done in the meantime. First tame mankind, the animal world will follow."

"In that case there is also much to be done in the fighting way in South Africa," I said. "Your savage tribes must be subdued: and in their way they seem brave and warlike."

"A courage that soon evaporates," replied Mr. N. "Like everything else they soon yield to the stronger power. I see rocks ahead, and before long there will be fighting in Matabeleland. Lobengula will give trouble, and the conflict must come. How soon it may



AVENUE NEAR CAPE TOWN.

be, I do not know ; but if we take them in the right way, it will be a short and easy victory."*

"These savage tribes are one of the mysteries of the world. But no doubt they have been subdued and civilised."

"Reflection would seem to convince us that the world is yet in its infancy," returned Mr. N. "It would appear that little has been done in comparison with what has to be done. And yet we do not know. Our ways are not as the ways of Heaven. For some reasons and from many signs about us, it would not be a calamity if we were approaching the last days. That we are really doing so is very problematical."

"In the meantime you live a glorious life here," I said. "I have seldom seen a spot so charming, and I could almost pitch my tent amongst you."

The minister shook his head. "I fear the charm would soon wear off," he replied. "After the civilised world of Europe, the great world of London, with its infinite intellectual resources, you would find us here but a 'sleepy hollow,' in which you might vegetate, but not live."

"There are great compensations," I objected, "and you must have very pleasant society amongst your professors. The whole place seemed full of a quiet charm, as we came through it: a town of avenues, in which the houses play only a secondary part. The air is sparkling and delicious, your mountains are wonderful, and the blue of your clear skies seems to envelope them."

"I fear we grow used to these simple charms," said the minister, "and do not notice them. Familiarity breeds not contempt but indifference. Yet the beauties of our atmosphere are remarkable, and I never tire of watching the changes and various moods of nature. We must go out, and I will show you the small lions of Stellenbosch. We do not roar very loudly."

At this moment his daughter appeared with a tray, and herself handed round tea, still carrying on the primitive simplicity which ruled this far-away home. Another custom with which we were unfamiliar, this dispensing of the cheering cup at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was all in good keeping with the surroundings.

"I must not go abroad in this costume," said the minister, looking down with quiet humour upon his blouse and wooden shoes. "It is scarcely clerical, though I am never happier than when wearing it, for then I am at work in my beloved garden."

He disappeared, and soon returned, so transformed in orthodox black coat and clerical collar that we did not know him again: whilst the wooden shoes were exchanged for ordinary boots. The dress, now more in accordance with one's usual ideas and experience,

* Recent events have proved how correct Mr. N. was in his views. His quiet life, full of thought and contemplation, helped him to "a right judgment in all things."



STELLENBOSCH.

was not half so picturesque as the garb which had reminded one of primeval days.

We went forth and spent a delicious hour or two wandering about the charming and endless avenues. The very air was perfumed with the subtle scents of nature. Everything spoke of a grave and quiet repose. In our walks, from first to last we did not meet six people. We visited the University, which seems complete in every department, and especially strong in science. There was an admirable laboratory and lecture room, and its professors are men of learning and renown. Here come students from all parts of the Colony, and education is excellent and inexpensive: very much, I think, upon the lines of some of the universities abroad, where so many of limited means are able to fight their way through the curriculum of a college education.

From the college windows there was a wonderful view over rich and cultivated gardens, and plains backed by the magnificent mountains, where a good deal of sport may be had. The light and sparkling air seemed to throw a bloom upon everything, and minute objects became distinctly visible. Here and there a house of more importance than its neighbours stood out, cool, white and refined; but an air of primitive simplicity was everywhere the predominant element: the key-note of the place.

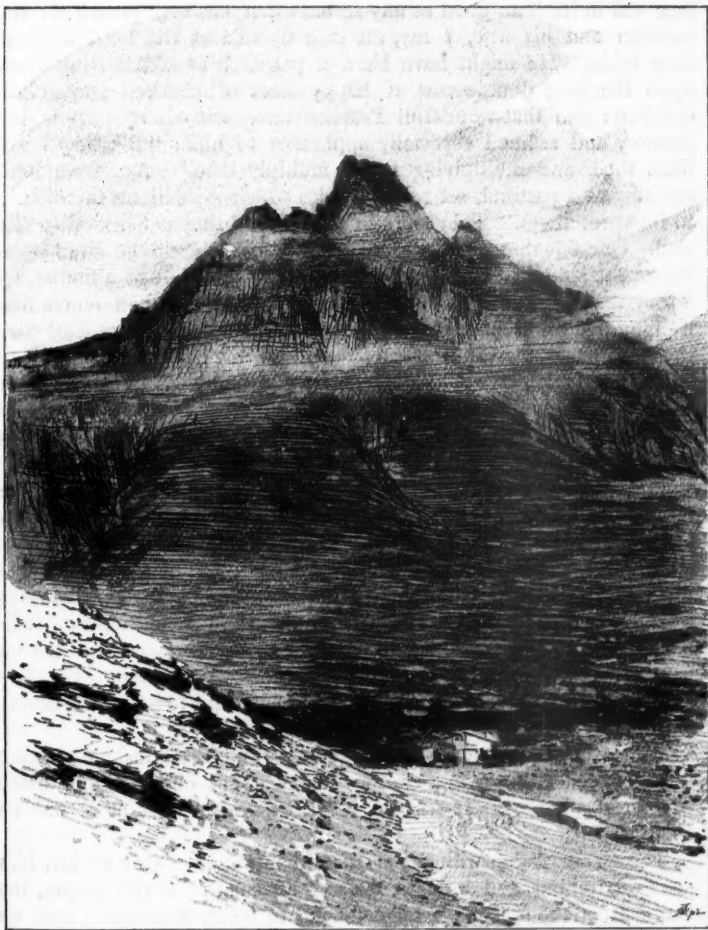
The knowledge that education is the chief object of Stellenbosch undoubtedly adds to its subtle charm. One felt surrounded by a small colony of learned and intellectual men, and life passes in a quiet and cultivated dream. Greater repose could not be imagined: a peace in which men should never grow old or weary; where the moral atmosphere should match the intellectual perfection: where the problems that disturb the outer world should never enter; where religious doubts and controversies should have no part, but all should be eloquent of divine revelations and ordering: sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything. Here a millennium should reign. But alas, the Canaanite is still in the land; and as into the very cells of convents and monasteries the old Adam will find its way, so no doubt the intellectual and moral atmosphere of Stellenbosch is occasionally charged with electricity, and men are too often reminded that they are human.

But to-day we only saw their better side and higher influence: the effect of Stellenbosch was that of a living pastoral; a dream of peace and beauty; a Garden of Eden without the serpent; a Paradise without temptation.

It was a delightful walk, made still more so by the minister's interesting conversation, which was full of anecdotes of his past life, and of many an adventure in his journeyings in South Africa. Finally we paid a visit to the simple Dutch Church: and when at the minister's request we ascended the pulpit for the sake of studying the effect of the building from that exalted pinnacle, and he laughingly suggested that I should turn preacher and he become congregation, I felt that

my text would have to be one descriptive of Eden before the fall, when the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was yet unplucked, and "all was piety and all was peace."

Neither text nor sermon came forth ; learning becomes me more



STELLENBOSCH.

than teaching ; and the minister might well have greeted my coming down with "Physician, heal thyself." But something told me that if we exchanged places, I should carry away with me a memorable sermon.

The hour for the midday meal was approaching : it is dinner-

time in this simple nook of earth, and we all knew better than to fail in punctuality.

So we presently found ourselves seated at the festive board ; the minister and his good and amiable wife, who seemed to have imbibed all the gentle and reposeful atmosphere of Stellenbosch, and whose face was in itself as good as any sermon that was ever preached : the minister and his wife, I say, sat side by side at the head of their long table. He might have been a patriarch of old looking down upon the long double row of happy faces of children and grandchildren : and that wonderful Promise unconsciously rose up in the memory and seemed especially applicable to him : "Blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." Again we were assisting at a pastoral, set to harmonies which needed no instrument to interpret them. They were in the air, and they penetrated to the soul. One felt that here was the true life that should be lived upon the earth : simplicity of taste, earnestness of aim ; a frugal abundance : "they that had little lacked nothing, and they that had much had nothing over." Such lives are holy and wholesome, or at least may easily be made so. In the outer world all this charm and simplicity is impossible : the ignoble aims of fashion and custom are for ever striving for a greater display instead of a higher ideal. Wealth and luxury and ease—these are not the ambitions of such a home as this Dutch Manse, of which it was our privilege that day to form a part.

Presently we adjourned to the garden, where a great deal of the minister's heart was to be found, and in which he passes many hours of his life.

It was an ideal garden ; large and fertile ; useful as well as ornamental : full of wonderful blooms and tropical plants, and amazing fruit trees. An abundance of fruit of the choicest description, sufficient to supply their wants all the year round, if man could live on fruit alone. Much of it is made into delicious preserve. The fruit season was nearly over, but there was still sufficient to prove the beauty and quality of what had been.

We sat under the shadow of large trees, and the sunshine pouring down, traced the moving glinting leaves about our feet, and made wonderful pictures. It was an ideal experience just as it was an ideal garden.

The air was laden with the scent of many fruits. One of Mr. N.'s sons went about and brought us an "aftermath" of rich grapes, the very last of the season ; a huge dishful of lovely muscatels ; and we were supposed not to cease our labours until the dish was emptied. One of the ladies flitted about from path to path, and finally appeared laden with gorgeous flaming blooms ; flowers that presently adorned the drawing-room and made it more beautiful than a room furnished with the choicest antiquities.

Some of the trees bore apples, the largest we had ever seen ; whilst on smaller apples was a bloom more beautiful and perfect than

anything ever found on the most carefully watched hot-house grapes in England, or the most luscious peaches. Nothing filled us with greater wonder and delight than this extraordinary bloom upon the apples. It was a new experience reserved for the fruit and climate of South Africa.

And once more, in this garden of Eden, we felt what a wonderful industry was in store for this new country in the near future: what boundless fruit-growing possibilities were here; how district after district may become one huge vineyard, one great orchard. Imagine, for a moment, mile after mile of country all abloom in the spring-time; showers of pink and white blossom falling under the clearest of blue skies, the most rarefied atmosphere; the ground for many a day's ride nothing but a carpet of pink and white petals. It is a picture difficult to realise, and yet it is not only within the bounds of possibility, but it will be almost a sin if it does not come to pass.

It will come to pass; for as labour and occupation become more and more difficult, the battle of life more keen, and competition grows stronger, new fields of industry must be opened up, and here will be found one of the most paying and one of the most charming of resources. Life to those so engaged will pass as a happy dream. Century after century has rolled away, and South Africa has been unknown, unappreciated; but it has bided its time, and it will now become one of the great countries of the twentieth century. And it is high time that a new country was opened up to solve some of the hopeless problems that are staring the old world in the face, and have led to so many questions to which as yet no answer has been found.

Emigration must be the hope of the future. Hitherto Europe has been the civilised world; the world of capital, of industry, and of population; but the day is approaching when these advantages must be more evenly scattered over the earth. We know not the Divine purpose, and it may be that the world is yet in its infancy. It would almost seem so, when we consider how large a portion of the globe is still almost untrodden by man. Four centuries ago America was unknown, and four centuries hence, the very deserts of Africa may teem with large towns and flourishing industries.

But this is wandering from the minister's garden, where we spent two or three such happy hours that they will ever be memorable.

Everything that was beautiful surrounded us; the perfume of fruits filled the air, mingling subtly with the scent of many a sweet-smelling flower. Plums and figs and apples still hung from many a branch, and the warmth of the sun brought out all their delicate flavour. Beyond the garden and across the plains uprose the wonderful mountains, upon which also a purple bloom seemed to hover. Their curious and beautiful outlines were sharply defined against the clear sky, and many a pass might be traced, stretching beyond sight into unknown regions. The minister enlivened the

hours by many an anecdote of his South African experiences : a new world to us, and therefore bringing new pictures before us with all the charm of freshness about them. They were golden moments spent in this golden sunshine, with all the lovely tracery of leaves and branches in sunlight and shadow about our path, and the purest of sparkling air carrying our voices to the far-off hills.

"It is an ideal life that you live here," I said. "I could find it in my heart to remain amongst you for ever, as I have already remarked. Surely you could never leave it?"

"Yes," replied the minister, "I could ; at the call of duty I could leave it to-morrow. I do not wish to leave it ; all my heart is here, all my affections ; some of my children are settled here ; but if the call came, I should respond to it."

I fear I could never be so brave.

When the time came for leaving, we felt as though we had known the minister for years instead of hours, and were parting from an old friend. I could not have conceived so much regret accompanying our farewell ; but we knew that we were probably turning our backs for ever upon Stellenbosch, and it was more than likely we should see the face of our kindly and hospitable friend no more. It is the unexpected which happens, you will say, but in these rapid days, for which life is far too short, we shall probably never again return to South Africa, once we have parted from its shores. And you who urged me never to come here at all would certainly never counsel a second visit.

Thus sorrow was mingled with our good-bye. Pleasure and pain for ever go hand in hand. There are not many earthly paradises, or it has not been our lot to meet with them. But circumstances give their colouring to everything ; and no doubt Stellenbosch would not have made so great an impression upon us without the geniality of the minister, the simplicity, repose and harmony of his home.

As we returned to Cape Town we mused and pondered over the day's delightful and exceptional experience, and wished that it might repeat itself on the morrow. Would it have been as charming, as full of the nameless and subtle atmosphere which breathed contentment to our minds and peace to our souls? No ; these exceptional days and experiences never quite repeat themselves ; the first draught of champagne is the most sparkling, the first pressure of the grape the sweetest.

We could not put the matter to the test, for that same night, at 10 o'clock, the *Dunottar* moved away from her moorings, and steadily, and with all the dignity of a monarch amongst ships, went down the harbour and passed through the lock gates into the open sea.

Once more we are travelling westward. To-morrow morning, all being well, we shall reach Port Elizabeth, where we land, make our

way by train to Grahamstown, spend there a quiet Sunday, and on Monday proceed onwards to East London by mail cart, a style of South African travelling to which we have yet to pay our tribute.

What that experience will prove must be the subject of another letter. For the moment we are surrounded by a lovely waste of wide blue waters. The vessel has become more yachtlike in appearance, for comparatively few passengers are on board, and, alas, our dear Mrs. S. is amongst the absent ones. We miss her calm beautiful face at every turn ; and in vain I await her daily morning visit on the bridge. The monsters of the deep now and then come and look at us—a distant whale blows a spout of water into the air, and with a contemptuous lash of his tail sails away to other seas. Dolphins we see occasionally, and porpoises without number. The skies are glorious. The long low line of the South African Coast is ever in view ; sometimes rocky and barren, but more often green, with valleys stretching far away inland, here and there blazing out in a huge prairie fire, very startling and effective at night. And again there are dark patches, which are nothing but endless forests, all waiting to be utilised, all crying out for man to come and clear the ground and cultivate the earth. Our present experience is the pleasantest part of the voyage ; full of delight and repose and an ever-changing panorama.

To-morrow morning this letter will be dropped into the Port Elizabeth Post Office. It will traverse the wide seas and in due time reach your hands. It sends you a greeting—accord it a welcome. And now the tiffin bell rings, and I suppose the summons has to be obeyed. Once more, my heart says to you—*Adieu jusqu'au revoir.*

ON A SILVER BEECH IN SPRING-TIME.

LIKE some fair maiden's hanging graceful head,
 As though abashed at her own loveliness,
 Thou seem'st to stand, robed in thy dainty dress
 Of freshest green, which Spring has lightly shed.
 A lace-like veil o'er drooping branches spread,
 While gleaming bright between each waving tress,
 Tossed to and fro beneath the wind's caress,
 Thy silver bark shows like a silver thread.
 Fair queen of trees ! a type thou surely art
 Of gracious womanhood, calm and serene,
 'Mid ruder forest growths thou tak'st thy part,
 Refinement shedding o'er the woodland scene.
 The oak and elm may stouter be of heart,
 But o'er them all thou reignest still as Queen.

E. M. ALFORD.

RENT DAY.

BY MRS. STEPHEN BATSON, AUTHOR OF "DARK: A TALE
OF THE DOWN COUNTRY."

IT was a pretty little old woman who sat by her hearthstone one gusty October evening, when the rain fell in great swirling sheets in the garden court outside, and the wind howled in the shaky lattice of the window-frames. There was not much fire in the wide grate, for she could ill afford to buy fuel. She picked up a few scattered sticks in the neighbouring park nearly every morning, and they served to warm her through the long winter, and to boil her kettle three times a day in the summer. Alas! that kettle now was to provide her, for a week to come, with the main part of her scanty meals, for the yearly rent day had arrived, and all her little fortune was to go to her landlord. Bread, moistened with hot water in her old blue basin, and sweetened with a little sugar, would be her breakfast and her supper for seven days to come, and, with a handful of vegetables from her garden, would furnish her also with seven frugal dinners.

She was a widow, and childless. If sons had remained alive to her, the Union authorities would have compelled them to contribute to her maintenance. But they were all dead, many years ago, and the guardians allowed her two shillings a week and a loaf of bread wherewith to maintain life in her poor old body as she best might compass with their dole. All through the year she had saved sixpence from her weekly income, and had hidden them all away in an old cracked teapot, toward the inevitable rent day. But even so she had but twenty-six shillings with which to meet the steward of the estate she lived on; the whole of the little dole received that morning from the relieving officer had gone, too, to join the smaller coins in the bottom of the great teapot which had served her large family fifty years before, when they sat round the tea-table, and cried for food as hungry children will. They were gone now, but the teapot remained as a receptacle for all her worldly wealth; some one had given her a smaller one for her own solitary use of late years, and she had no need for this old friend in its original capacity.

She was nearly eighty years old, and her face was lined and corrugated with a hundred wrinkles. She wore a white cap with a closely quilled border, and looked as fresh and dainty as any lady in the land. Her dark, grey linsey gown had lasted her for best over a dozen years, and had lately been taken of necessity into common everyday wear; it had been many a time through the wash-tub, and was patched and darned with the extremest care and economy. Over it a blue checked apron covered one of white flax, and was removed

only when company came to see her, to reveal the dazzling cleanliness of the under "pinner." Her room, too, was spotlessly clean, and the red bricks shone brightly in the firelight. On the table by her side stood a dip candle which she would quickly light if any neighbour came to pay her a visit; the evenings were growing long, and she could not afford to burn a candle from twilight to bedtime, so she sat by the embers, and thought, and the candle was ready for any sudden need.

She got up after a time and went to the great grandfather clock which stood against the wall, and read the hour with her sharp eyes, and then sat down again in the wooden elbow-chair, which had been her dead husband's favourite seat.

"Six o'clock," she said to herself, for she often spoke aloud for the feeling of company which it suggested—"Six o'clock, an' gettin' on fur hafe paist, an' her ent come yet. Oh Lar'! oh Lar'! I be gettin' so trembly; my heart be a-gallop' in he's socket a good-un. But her wunt desaive ma—I knaws it, thank the Lard. But still I be gettin' ter'ble trembly—th' Almighty forgie ma fur distrustin' of Un, an' of her, too, as never desaived ma yet."

Even as she spoke a quick, light step came up the garden court through the stormy night, and a sharp knock rang out in the still lane.

"Come in—come in, my dear," cried the old lady, hobbling to the door, and setting it wide open to admit her visitor in a seemly manner, "come in, an' set down—why, 'tis only Tom Eddards arter all!"

A diminutive boy, whose appearance gave the lie to his age, which was well known to be far advanced in the teens, entered, and sat down in the elbow-chair. The old dame blew out the candle she had lighted for his mistress; what did Tom Edwards need of so great an honour?

Tom Edwards was the garden boy at the Rectory; he was a very important person in his own eyes, and a good boy too, but she could not waste dip candles on the likes of him.

He sat down now with an air of more than ordinary importance, and wiped the rain and the perspiration together from his dripping brow with the cuff of his coat sleeve.

"Lar' bless 'ee, Mrs. Dowling," he said, "'tis cluttry weather, an' no mistake. Fight my way up your path I did, though I baint so easy to upset, neither."

The garden boy expanded his little chest, and tried to look like a full-blown gardener; but he failed lamentably, for he was so very small and weak to look at.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Dowling in a half absent manner, while her eyes still searched the darkness beyond the lattice, "an' you've a-bin sent wi' a arrand, I'll war'nt, an' the missis baint a-comin' out to see ma to-night."

"The missis," said the garden boy with an air of authority, "is wheer she'd ought to ha' bin all this blessed day—in her bed. The Rector sent she to't half an hour since, wi' a cough fit to tear the house down. But don't you be afeard, Mrs. Dowling; she ain't forgot you."

"Her never desaiwed ma yet, an' her wun't desaiwe ma now," replied Mrs. Dowling, with the conviction born of twenty years of confidence.

"Out all the marnin' she were, in the pony cart, a-gwine to the furdest folks as couldn't come to she. Seven widders we saw afore dinner-time; I baint a-tellin' no lie, fur I went wi' her to hold the pony, an' I counted 'em. Lar' bless 'ee, my dear soul, she coughed fit to turn the cart over two or three times. I'd a mind, more'n wunst, to tell her to come home, but 'tis a headstrong seck, an' obstinit, an' I didn't."

The garden boy was valiant in his words when he could trust his audience; but in manner and appearance, when he drove out with his mistress, he was a most exemplary groom, playing his part with studied imitation of the head footman at the Hall. Nothing could disturb his conventional repose save only one thing. He was a passionate lover of sport, as, in his own small way, he was acquainted with its joys; if a hare or a rabbit, a partridge or a pheasant appeared anywhere between the pony-cart and the horizon, his little arms would unfold, and a small finger would be stretched out towards the furred or feathered creature away in the distance, while a piping voice that strove in vain to be deep and manly would call his mistress's attention to the quarry with a single word.

"Rabbut!" he would exclaim, or, if need were, "Purtridge!" or whatever name the thing that had attracted his attention might own; and then he would subside once more into his attitude of studied apathy. This was the one habitual lapse from decorum of the garden boy in his relations with his mistress, and Mrs. Dowling knew better than to credit him with the bad manners he confessed to having been very nearly guilty of.

"Lar, my dear," she cried, "an' I a-lookin' for her this cruel night!"

"We've a-hed the house full all the arternoon," continued Tom Edwards—"leastways the parish room, however. What wi' onions here, an' pertaters thur, an' 'Tom, carry this yer baskut out to Hallett,' or 'Tom, tell Martha to find a shelf in the storeroom for these apples,' it hev bin a hard day fur me as well as fur she. I be a strong fellow, as you knows, Mrs. Dowling," expanding his chest again, and, with a fierce frown, challenging contradiction, "but sacks an' bushel baskuts begin to tell on ma."

"Was there so many up at Rectory then, Tom?"

"Well-nigh a score, fust an' last, an' all wi' summat to sell to help wi' their rent to-morrer. Why, my dear soul, her knaws to a T which be they as needs money, an' she'd given 'em the order, months back,

to come an' see her the day before rent day. But I did larf when Shady Joyce come in wi' a clothes baskut o' apples, an' set 'em down on the floor as bold as brass."

"That drinkin' scoundrel—never!"

"A did, however, an' I wunt tell 'ee no lie. Spoke out too, a did, a good-un. 'Yur be dree bushel, ma'am,' a said, in he's common way o' talkin', 'at vower shillin' a bushel, but you shall hae the lot fur hafe a suv'ren.'

"'You be martly mistook, Shedruck,' says the missis, 'fur I baint agwine to hae 'em at all. I didn't ax you to bring 'em,' her said. 'Lar', ma'am,' says he, 'I brought 'em,' says he, 'because I ain't made up my rent. 'Tis fur Squire's rent day to-morrer I wants the money,' says he, 'tis him as wants it, however, an' I wunt desaive 'ee—I ent got enough,' a says. 'You be tellin' truth thur, Shedruck,' says the missis; 'tis Squire as wants it, but 'tis the Dun Cow as 'ould get it, if so be I was to buy your apples.'

"Ah, her talks straight, do Mrs. Curtis—straight an' honest. Ther be them as don't hold wi' her manner o' talkin', but I allus spakes up fur she. Her barks, but her don't bite, I says. 'Tis the Dun Cow as 'ould get it,' says she! That be as true a word as ever was spoke.

"So Shady up's wi's baskut, an' reels as fur as grunsel, fur he'd had a drop, Shed had; an' a says, says he, 'If you wunt help ma,' a says, 'ther be one above as I can trust to. Th' Almighty wunt desert ma,' says he. 'You be mistook again, Shedruck,' says the missis, 'if you looks to th' Almighty to do fur 'ee what you'd ought to do fur yourself. I wunt buy your apples when there be many pore an' deservin' as wants the money, but I'll give you a five pun' note, willin',' her says, 'if you'll pint out one thing to ma.' 'What be that?' says Shed, eager-like. 'If you can pint out a teetotaller in this yer parish as ever wanted fur anything,' says the missis. So Shady he outs wi's baskut, fur he couldn't find nowt to say, an' goes off to the Dun Cow, an' sells his apples fur a gallon o' beer."

The garden boy was groping in the depths of his trousers pockets, while he recounted the demolition of Shadrach Joyce, and he produced from one of them a strip of paper which he laid on the table.

"Shall us light the candle?" he asked.

The candle was lighted, and the paper was spread out before Mrs. Dowling's puzzled eyes. It was a cheque for a small sum, and Tom proceeded to explain its meaning.

"When the Rector sends missis to bed, her turns to me an' axes ma to come an' see you, an' tell you how 'tis her couldn't come down. 'But I wunt disappint her,' says she, 'fur I promised her should hae it to-night, an' hae it her shall. Tom 'ool see to't as well as ever I could,' says she. So, if you please you be to let us hae what pertaters you wants to sell to make up the rent, an' you can return the change out o' this yer to missis, next time her comes down."

"What be't, Tom?" cried the old woman, trembling. "Oh, Lard! what be thic thur thing?"

"A cheque," replied Tom, with some slight scorn. "Ain't you never seen a cheque afore?"

"Never—the Lard be praised. I've yeerd o' they as hev' bin sent to prison fur meddlin' wi' them things. But what do it say, my dear?"

"I'll rade un to 'ee. 'Pay to Eliza Dowling, or bearer, the sum of one pound (£1). Signed, Frances Curtis.' How much hev you got a'ready fur the rent?"

"Twenty-eight shillin'."

"Then you wants twelve shillin' more. If you lets us hae two sacks o' pertaters that'll be right, an' you can return the eight shillin' to missis arter the steward's give you the change fur the cheque."

"But what be I to do wi' thiccy paper, my dear?"

"Pay your rent wi't," reiterated Tom impatiently.

"Oh Lawks, oh deary me! Oh, I be so frowtened!"

"Frowtened—'cause you've a got the money you wants!"

"If so be 'tis the money, Tom, but it don't sim like 't, an' I knows them as hev' bin sent to prison fur——"

"Do you think as I be desaivin' on 'ee?" cried Tom with an attempt at great sternness.

"No, my dear—no, my dear, never—nor the missis neither; but it makes I tremble, Tom."

"Well there 'tis, anyway, an' the steward wunt make no objection to't, I'll go bail. Wishin' you good evenin', Mrs. Dowling, fur my tea be a-waitin' for ma this hafe hour."

Tom went down the garden path with as firm and loud a step as he could command, and Mrs. Dowling was left with the cheque outspread on the table before her.

From motives of economy she blew out the candle directly the boy had left the cottage, and for quite a quarter of an hour she sat in the glimmering firelight beside the awful Thing. There it lay on the table, a kind of pale ghost on the dark wood; and over and over again her eyes were attracted to it sorely against her will as it lay there. After a little time she bent down to the embers and lighted the candle once more.

"I caint sit in the dark wi't," she murmured to herself. "The Old Un med tempt ma wi't, or summat. There was Jack Brown as got locked up fur meddlin' wi' writin's. Oh, deary, deary me!"

She sat for a long time, the candle wasting itself out as the evening drew on. After a long interval she got up from her chair, and went to the little shelf near the door, and reached down the great family Bible.

"I'll put the Book on the thing," she muttered; "mebbe it 'ool hinder it from workin' mischief."

At eight o'clock a quick tramp came up the path, and the latch was lifted by an impetuous hand. A young man of ruddy counte-

nance and bucolic appearance strode into the little kitchen, and his burly frame and cheerful face seemed to fill the room immediately. He was a fine young fellow, and his position in life was at the plough tail; no one could turn a furrow so well or so evenly as honest Jim Dowling."

"Good evenin', aunt," he said in his loud, hearty way.

"Good evenin', Jim," said she in a voice more than common tremulous, "'tis main thankful I be to see 'ee, my dear."

"There be summat wrong, baint a?" asked Jim Dowling, looking hard into the old woman's face which was working with emotion.

And then the whole story came out. How the Rector's wife had promised to help her as usual with her rent by buying what garden stuff she could best spare; how Tom Edwards had brought some mysterious Thing which was to stand for payment of the potatoes; how martly afraid she was of it, for she had known those who had been sent top rison for meddling with writings:—and she ended her story with an agitated appeal to Jim for his advice in her trouble.

Urged by his aunt, Jim removed the Book in a tentative and uncertain way, and putting it down on one side disclosed the slip of paper beneath. He placed the candle near, and read the words on the cheque aloud, spelling them out with difficulty, for it was now some eight or ten years since he had left the village school, and Jim was no scholar. In his face there was visible a great suspicion, partly held in check by an inborn feeling of confidence in the sender, who was considered in the village to be as far above suspicion as any merely mortal woman could attain to. Yet assuredly, he, too, had heard of those who had been sent to prison for meddling with cheques, and no longer ago than last year. Misgiving strove with the faith deeply rooted in his breast, and eventually gained the day.

"Aunt," he said, and his jolly red face became grave and anxious as he spoke—"Aunt, do 'ee ax my 'pinion on this yer job?"

"Yes, my dear; I caint sim to see 't right myself, nohow."

"Then what I says, be this—don't you hae no hands wi't. That's what I says, aunt."

"But, my dear, 'tis Mrs. Curtis as sent it to ma, an' I 'ouldn't go fur to show no distrust o' she, be 't how 'twull."

"Aunt, was you a-axin' o' my 'pinion?"

"Yes, sure, my dear."

"Then, aunt, you've a-got un."

"Got what, my dear?"

"Got my 'pinion. What I says be this—don't you hae no hands wi't."

"But 'tis Mrs. Curtis as sent un to ma. Her 'ouldn't do no wrong to I."

"Mebbe not," replied Jim, but with reserve.

"Then I'd ought to do as her says, Jemps."

"I thought you axed my 'pinion, aunt," returned Jim with an air of studied indifference.

"So I did, so I did, an' meanin' no offence to 'ee—nor narn to she, neither," murmured the old woman.

"Then you've a-got un," returned her nephew in a tone of finality.

"But why, why, my dear? I knaws I caint trust the thing, but I don't feel no sort o' raison in't, Jemps."

"Raisons be fur them as don't know. *I knaws.* I don't offer no raison, though I lay I could find 'ee one afore long if I had a mind to 't. What I says be as you'd best hae no hands wi' 't. I don't say as it'll bring 'ee trouble; I don't say as them sart o' things be agen religion, nor yet agen sense, though I likes to see my money when I've a-yarned un, an' I 'ouldn't never be put off wi' no sech rubbage as this yer. I don't say nowt agen it, but I says, an' I says it plain, aunt—don't 'ee hae no hands wi' 't. I don't tell 'ee as bad 'ould come on 't, fur I don't know, but there be some things as be best left alone, an' this yer be one on 'em."

"Then I'll lave it alone, Jim," cried Mrs. Dowling with some firmness, yet with a sorrowful yearning for the money, "an' Mr. Pearce must trust ma till I can see Mrs. Curtis."

"No, aunt; you've a-hed your rent ready all these years, an' you'll hae it ready now. I hed a suv'ren saved up to buy ma a pair o' boots, an' I was gwine to town to-morrer wi' Polly to get em; but you shall hae twelve shillin' o' mine till you can see Mrs. Curtis or the Rector, an' Polly an' me'll go another day."

And so it was arranged. Jim went home and got four half-crowns and a florin from his little store, and added them to the contents of the teapot. Moreover, at his aunt's entreaty he carefully and solemnly picked up the cheque, and laid it between the leaves of the Book, well in towards the binding so that no part of it might be visible. Then the Book was placed reverently on its shelf, and Mrs. Dowling took the teapot upstairs, and hid it under her bed for the night, and in the morning she was the first of the Squire's tenants to meet the steward, and pay the rent of her cottage and garden.

Three days after, hearing that Mrs. Curtis was recovered from her cold, and able once more to see her visitors, she toddled up the hill to the Rectory, and rang the bell of the Parish Room, which was always answered by the Rector himself, or by his wife.

Mrs. Curtis came out with a shawl round her thin shoulders, and made her sit down by the fire, and sent for a cup of tea for her visitor, and tried to still her nervous trembling. It was not often that Mrs. Dowling was able to climb that steep hill. Presently the old woman recovered herself a little, and began to search in the deep pocket of her under-skirt, producing from it at last a white handkerchief neatly folded. Inside the handkerchief there was a large piece of newspaper, also folded in a long, narrow parcel, and within the paper lay the cheque, unused and unsoiled.

"But what is this?" cried Mrs. Curtis, as the scrap of paper lay outspread before her wondering eyes, "why didn't you use the money—didn't you want it?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said her visitor, trembling again very exceedingly, and crying partly, and partly laughing, "don't 'ee be angered wi' ma, I prays of 'ee. I didn't rightly understand the Thing, an' I couldn't sim to want to hae no hands wi' t, an' our Jim lent ma the money till you was well enough to see ma; an' oh, I thank the Lard that I've a-got un out o' my house at laist. Th' Almighty was allus ter'ble good to me, and I be main thankful to Un for ahl He's mercies."

"OUR NAN."

AH! she has crossed the briny deep a thousand times, I ween,
To linger in the meadow-lands of never-fading green;
At sunrise, 'midst the silence of the everlasting snow,
She climbs the highest Alpine peak to catch the roseate glow,
That flits across the glaciers to the cataract below.

Ay! not a quaint old city near the golden Zuyder Zee,
But our sweet maid with busy foot has tripped away to see;
And there she spends the live-long hours, as happy as the day,
Though she beyond her village home has never been away.

Sometimes she sets forth gaily, ere the wintry day is done,
Along the glittering path of rays of golden-setting sun;
Upon the winged wind to flit above the crimson west,
Until, amidst the stars serene, she drifts away to rest.

The summer days oft find her with a bucket in her hand,
In quest of prickly "urchins," or of sea-shells on the strand;
Or wandering in some woodland dell, a hundred miles from
home,
Where merry brooklets splash the fern with iridescent foam.

Here she has spent the live-long hours, as happy as the day,
Though she beyond her village home has never been away;
Ay! there upon the sofa, with her crutches by her side,
The hours of pain pass gaily, as, her hobby horse astride,
"Our little Nan," on fancies' wings, the universe doth ride.

A M. TROTTER.

STRAY THOUGHTS ON STRAY CATS.

"THE house-cat is a four-legged quadruped, the legs as usual being at the corners. It is what is sometimes called a tame animal, though it feeds on mice and birds of prey. Its colours are striped, tortusshell, black, also black and white, and others. When it is happy it does not bark but breathes through its nose instead of its mouth. Cats also mow, which you have all heard. Cats have nine lives, but which is seldom wanted in this country coz of Christianity. Cats eat meat and most anythink, speshully where you can't afford. This is all about cats."

The above is a quotation from a Board School boy's essay, taken from Mr. Barker's amusing volume. It seems to me wonderfully pithy and well expressed, and shows how clever we can be before over-education has laid its withering hand upon us.

For the subject of "cats" is a vast one! There are, it is said, over five millions of inhabitants in London; it is an awful thought when once one comes seriously to entertain it, and still more awful is it to reflect that there are certainly no less than five million cats who are dependent on the human beings aforesaid.

This is decidedly not too high a statement; for every rich man keeps at least one cat, and there being no cat tax, every poor man also keeps one, if not several; to say nothing of the ladies who, like Dame Wiggins of Lee, keeps "seven fine cats" and more. If the human race is prolific, the cat-race is certainly not less so; at least one-half of these cats have three families a year, the greater part of which either run wild, or, as M. Pierre Loti has it, are "brought up with tenderness and placed advantageously in the neighbourhood." Therefore, even allowing for the sad fate of the pail that so often awaits infant kittens, the sum of cats in London must be at least equal to that of their masters.

Five million cats! It sounds at first as alarming as Bishop Hatto's celebrated army of rats! for though a cat in the singular may be a charming pet, yet in the aggregate they do not somehow enlist our sympathies. They certainly do not enlist the sympathies of the ragged youth of their neighbourhood. Let us hope that the little essay-writer quoted above never pulled a cat's tail or helped to enrage it in any other way. It would be nice to think so, if one could, but alas! only too improbable.

Leaving little boys and their attentions, however, out of the question, it is not only old maids who care for cats; for the cat, thanks to Mdlle. Ronner, Mr. Louis Wain and other artists, is gradually rising in favour, and people are now even known to stand up in its defence.

Great writers often have a love for cats ; M. Pierre Loti, the newly-elected French Academician above mentioned, holds his own up to undying fame in a pathetic story, one of the most beautiful things he has written ; Mr. Pater has two lovely long-haired Persians to guard his hearth and sit at his table, and has not the charming "Elia," to go back to old times, told us that his cat was as much a beloved companion as his "faithful Bridget." To the cat in fiction, injustice is still occasionally done ; for was it not the other day that the accomplished authoress of "The Silence of Dean Maitland" made a cat's life to extend over a period of twenty-five years ? a thing manifestly impossible ; and are not children still taught, in the language of Miss Jane or Ann Taylor, that :—

"The dog will come when he is called,
The cat will walk away."

Thus early do we prejudice infant minds against poor harmless, much-enduring pussy.

Mongrels of all races have always seemed to me the most interesting of their kind, perhaps because continual hardships bring out character ; hence it is to these that I confine my present remarks. Living near dingy London slums I every day see pass and repass myriads of cats ; a few of them happy-go-lucky wanderers, raking their daily food out of dust-bins ; but the large majority, poor, mangy animals, seeking in vain for rest, and finding none. On rainy days in winter, I have often seen door-steps occupied both by old women, and sick cats, and I have pitied the cat the most ; for the old woman has at least the workhouse or the casual ward to go to ; neither can one accuse the cat of having brought herself to this plight, through the persuasiveness of the neighbouring gin-shop. However, it is one thing to pity a cat, and quite another to take in and feed all the houseless wanderers one sees, their name being Legion. A cat tax would improve this sad state of affairs ; or, failing this, a parish lethal chamber ; for it is often a kindness to put the poor things out of their misery.

As things at present are, I would have people who kill cats, in however kindly meant a spirit, take upon themselves the sole responsibility of their burial. It is unpleasant to have a poisoned cat slowly dying in agonies on your doorstep, or in front of your area railings, tortured by sundry street arabs and their stones. It is exhausting to chase away the boys, who continually return to the charge ; and besides, you have finally to pay for the removal of the body, which becomes quite an expense in time. But for this there is no redress. Cats at present are held to be "wild animals," and in the eye of the law do not "belong to anybody."

The cat-tax, which would effectually reduce their numbers, would perhaps press hardly on the poor, whose chief pets they are ; but if we cannot have the cat-tax, let us at any rate have the lethal chamber.

As I write a vision rises before me of a mangy, tailless black cat who haunts my area, to whom its highest spikes are but a mere plaything—a very Pariah of a cat. What good can his existence do to himself or to anyone else? and yet I do not like, on that cat's behalf alone, to imbrue my hands in murder.

But a parish lethal chamber would simplify matters. How often have I not wished that such a thing were handy! I met a poor cat once who was crawling along furtively, a piteous wounded skeleton, in dire suffering. As it looked at me sadly out of its dim bleared eyes, one would have been inhuman indeed not to take pity on it. But when I begged a passing policeman to kill it for me with a timely blow on the head, the stern guardian of the law replied, shaking his head: "Durstn't do it, ma'am! don't think of it;" as though it had been an action to be deprecated, like a theft.

I have, indeed, taken the law into my own hands on several occasions. When a poor sick cat had sat for some three weeks uncomplainingly on my doorstep, I one day called it in, warmed and fed it, then, putting it carefully into a covered basket, carried it to the chemist's. The chemist is a friend of mine and therefore consented to administer a drop of prussic acid, in the little dark room behind the shop where he usually extracted teeth. But here a fresh difficulty arose. The chemist said he could not do it alone; he must have the cat held for him. Could I do it? I shuddered at the bare idea. Fortunately at that moment a boy of tender years passed by the shop-door, humming a popular air.

"Will you," I said apologetically, "mind holding this cat while the chemist poisons him?"

The apology was needless. The boy's eyes glowed.

"Won't I just?" he said meaningly.

There was a gasp from the cat, a strong smell of prussic acid, and the boy emerged beaming, with the cat dangling by one leg.

"That's won'erful stuff," he said admiringly; "why, the cat didn't mow once!"

I gave him some pennies and he departed with the poor little corpse, I having no space to bury it in.

"What are you going to do with the body?" I asked.

"Throw 'er over the first garden-wall I come to," replied the youth with a fine indifference.

The friendly chemist has thus shortened the troubles of life for several ailing cats; it has ever been an oft-recurring item in my chemist's bill; but my old cook, Maggie, doesn't approve of this. She adores cats, and whenever I go into the kitchen I find her with at least two on her back, clawing at her cap: "The little kitties," she calls them tenderly, and besides this has christened them severally by the romantic names of Phyllis and Margery. Old Maggie says that I shall "get my name up," if I go on taking stray cats to the chemist. What "getting my name up" may be I know not, but it

sounds alarming. She goes on to say that she "don't 'old" with taking life.

"But if the creature's suffering," I argue, "it's surely a kindness to it to put it out of its misery."

Old Maggie is not convinced. "Well, we ~~don't~~ know," she says, "as 'ow life ain't given for some good cause—and where do we get the right from to take it?"

I have at the bottom of my heart an uncomfortable feeling that there may be something in what old Maggie says—cats may enjoy life in their way, even when sick and miserable. Are we ourselves any more anxious to die under such conditions, than was the old man of *Æsop's Fables*? We enjoy the pleasures of recollection: and so may cats in old age, as Calverley suggests, enjoy the thought of those blissful rambles of their youth.

"I remember, I remember, how one night I fled by,
And gained the blessed tiles and gazed into the cold clear sky;
I remember, I remember, how my various lovers came,
And there, beneath the crescent moon, played many a little game."

Old Maggie had certainly never been addicted to lovers herself, but for that reason she has perhaps all the more sympathy with cats' romances. "You couldn't be fonder of them if they really had souls," I was one day driven to remark.

"Well, 'm, no, I can't think as they have souls, but they thinks a deal, bless 'em, the dear little kitties!"

And I go my way pondering over Maggie's words, more than ever determined to add as far as I can to the happiness of the stray cats whose instinct may lead them to the shelter of my doorstep. Maggie would certainly offer no objection, and I have sometimes had visions of pensioning her off in her old age, and setting her up in a crèche for the poor "four-legged quadruped, whose legs as usual are at the corners."



AN INNOCENT THIEF.

BY M. E. STANLEY PENN.

"YES, Miss Falconer is a remarkably pretty girl, but——"

"Pretty! She is the loveliest girl I ever saw, and the sweetest!"

This emphatic declaration was uttered by my ex-ward, Reginald Dane, as we stood together, one brilliant January afternoon, on the terrace of the Casino at Monte Carlo.

He turned his back on the sea as he spoke, and faced me with a rather militant air, and his hands in his pockets.

"My dear boy, I don't deny it," I answered, pacifically, taking out my cigar-case; "she is all that is lovely and of good repute; but—she has a father." I paused impressively. "I ask you frankly—is Captain Falconer precisely the sort of man you would select for a papa-in-law?"

Reginald stared moodily at his boots, and made no reply.

"A man," I continued, deliberately, "of whom it is flattery to say that his character is doubtful, for there has long ceased to be any doubt about it. A *roué* and gambler, and worse, if report speaks truly."

"I know all that," he rejoined; "but if I married her, I should sever all connection with the Captain, you may be sure. He should never cross my threshold."

"Would Miss Falconer consent to a total separation from her only parent? She is evidently devoted to him."

"I don't know about devotion; she is very sweet and dutiful, but I fancy she has more fear than affection for him. He has an iron will."

"And an extraordinary influence over the will of others," I added. "I have felt it myself. By the way, it remains to be seen whether he will consent to the marriage."

Reginald looked at me rather blankly.

"Why, do you think there is any doubt of that? I fancied that—living the life he does—he would be rather glad to get his daughter off his hands."

"Perhaps—living the life he does—he may find her useful."

"Useful? Good heavens, Sir John, you don't mean that he uses Elsie as—as a decoy? What a horrible idea!"

"Not as a decoy, but as what the French call a *porte-respect*. The presence of a beautiful, lady-like, and irreproachable daughter gives him a sort of *cachet* of respectability which inspires confidence."

My companion was silent a moment, pulling his moustache.

"Oh, well," he said at last, looking up, "it's no use anticipating

evils. I fancy I shall be able to 'square' the Captain if he makes any difficulties. I happen to know that he is at rather a low ebb just now."

I also happened to be aware of the same fact, it having been brought to my notice, as no doubt it had to Reginald's, by a request for a loan. I might have complied with it, having the misfortune to belong to what Charles Lamb calls "the inferior race" of lenders, but for the interposition of a certain lady who is not only the partner of my joys and sorrows, but the keeper of my purse.

"No, Sir John, you will not lend Captain Falconer fifty pounds," that lady had said with decision, in the privacy of a conjugal *tête-à-tête*. "He is a dangerous and disreputable person, and if it were not for his daughter—whom I pity sincerely, poor child!—I would have nothing whatever to do with him. As it is, I wish with all my heart he was staying at another hotel."

But though she expressed her opinion of him with great vigour in private, it was noticeable that my wife was rather markedly civil to Captain Falconer in public. The fact is, there was something about the man—a suggestion of latent power—which, though it might not inspire respect, exacted politeness, even from those who disliked and distrusted him.

He was a tall, soldierly-looking man of four or five and forty, with a beak-like aquiline nose, a drooping moustache, and remarkably bright, penetrating dark eyes: "mesmeric eyes," my wife called them, and declared they had an uncanny power of reading one's thoughts.

Coming into lunch at the — Hotel somewhat late, after my conversation with Reginald Dane above recorded, I found the usual group assembled at the end of the long *table d'hôte*; Captain Falconer next to my wife, and beyond him, his daughter, Elsie, a pretty, fair-haired, fragile-looking girl of nineteen, at whose side sat Reginald. Captain Falconer, I found, had hit upon a topic which was sure to interest my wife. He was talking of diamonds.

"I was telling Lady Rushton," he explained affably, turning to me, "that I, like herself, am something of a connoisseur in diamonds."

"And Captain Falconer says, John," she added, "that he has never seen finer stones than those in the bracelet I wore last night—the one you gave me on my last birthday."

"H'm, they ought to be good, they cost enough," I grumbled, being hungry and somewhat cross.

"They are magnificent; old Brazilian of the purest water. But, my dear Lady Rushton," he continued, "is it wise to travel with such valuable jewellery, in these days of railway robberies and hotel thieves? Nothing is more easily snapped up than a jewel-case."

"I don't carry my jewels in a case," she returned confidentially; "when we are on a journey I wear them in a belt, and at night I put the belt——"

I touched her foot under the table, and she paused.

"Yes?" the Captain said interrogatively, looking her straight in the face with his piercing dark eyes.

"I put it—" she repeated, and paused again, then, as he still looked at her steadily, she finished her sentence with a jerk, as if the words had been forced from her—"under my pillow."

"Hus—sh, my dear madam—not so loud!" he whispered warningly, glancing over his shoulder; "I fear the waiter heard you. Let us talk of something else."

When my wife and I were alone, half an hour later, she startled me by exclaiming: "John, I believe Captain Falconer is Mephistopheles in person! You heard the stupid thing I said at lunch?"

"I heard you announcing to all whom it might concern, where you put your jewels at night," I answered drily.

"Yes—was it not idiotic? I was perfectly aware of it at the time, but, do you know, Captain Falconer *forced* me to tell him. I tried to keep the words back, but his eyes seemed to wring them from me in spite of myself. Do you think—" she hesitated—"do you think he had any particular motive in asking?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't say, I'm sure, what his motive was," I rejoined, "but I think, on the whole, my dear, you had better find another hiding-place for your diamonds."

Now it befell that two nights after this episode I was visited by a strange dream—if dream it were; but it was uncommonly like reality. I was unusually restless that night, and for some hours after Lady Rushton had been peacefully slumbering, I tossed and turned, trying in vain to sleep.

At last I fell into a doze, in which there came to me a hazy idea that the window, which I had left half closed, was now wide open, and that something, or someone, was moving near it.

For the better understanding of what follows, I must explain that our room was on the second floor front, and adjoined Miss Falconer's chamber, on the other side of which was that occupied by Reginald Dane. Captain Falconer slept on the floor above. The window opened after the usual foreign fashion, like a folding door, and had a hand-rail, but no balcony. Beneath was the stone terrace in front of the hotel.

It was clearly impossible for any living creature without wings to enter the room from that window; yet in my half-waking, half-dozing condition, it seemed to me that someone had entered by it.

A woman's figure, which might have dropped from the clouds, so suddenly had it appeared, stood in the opening, and after a pause stepped lightly in between the muslin curtains, and noiselessly approached the bed. As it came forward, the light of the night-lamp fell full upon its face. With a sudden shock and thrill of startled recognition, I saw that it was Miss Falconer.

She still wore her dinner-dress, with a light shawl over her

shoulders. Her face was pale, and had a strained and anxious look which was not the vacant expression of a sleep-walker.

Without the least hesitation, she made her way to Lady Rushton's side of the bed, and cautiously slipped her hand beneath the pillow.

Whatever she expected to find was evidently not there. Again and again the stealthy hand renewed its search—in vain.

At length she withdrew it, stood for a few seconds irresolute, then turned away, and crossing the room with a noiseless but leisurely step, passed out through the window—passed out, as it seemed, into mid-air—and vanished!

For a few moments I was literally too astonished to move, and lay staring stupidly at the window by which she had so unaccountably disappeared.

Then, waking up all at once, I sprang from the bed, and looked out wildly at earth, and air, and sky, in search of my mysterious visitor. There was not a trace of her to be seen, nor was there any rope or ladder by which she could have entered. A broad ledge, or pediment of sculptured stone, forming part of the architectural decoration of the house, projected beneath the windows, but it was divided by a good four feet from the corresponding ledge of the next one.

That she could have crossed the intervening space, unaided, at such a giddy height, was clearly an impossible supposition. Then how had she come, and gone?

Craning my neck, I could see that her window was closed and shuttered, no gleam of light appearing between the shutters, and no sound coming from the room. The more I puzzled over the matter, the more mysterious did it appear, and I began to think that I must in fact have dreamt the whole incident.

"What in the world are you doing at the window?" my wife's voice demanded, sleepily.

"I—was looking at the moon, my dear," I answered in some confusion, and was preparing to return to bed and resume my interrupted slumbers, when I caught sight of a small white object lying on the floor at my feet.

It was a lady's handkerchief—a dainty little lace-bordered square of cambric, embroidered in one corner with a Christian name in full. The name was Elsie.

The following morning, contrary to my usual habit, I rose early and went at once in search of Miss Falconer, whom I knew I should be pretty sure to find in the garden. I came upon her presently seated under a drooping pepper-tree, with a book on her knee.

The day was Sunday, and there was, I thought, a sort of Sabbath atmosphere about the girl as she sat there in her fresh white gown, the image of maiden purity and peace. With her delicate pensive face framed in cloudy golden hair, her soft appealing blue eyes and sensitive lips, she might have been the original of one of Raphael's

Madonnas. So lovely and so lovable she looked, it seemed sacrilege to suppose her capable of any evil thought or deed.

She glanced up with a smile as I approached—we were very good friends, she and I. “You are up early this morning, Sir John,” she said, closing her book; “that is unusual, is it not?”

“Yes; early rising is not one of the virtues I practise habitually,” I rejoined; “I keep it for special occasions.”

“And is this a special occasion?”

“Certainly! I got up early to meet you.”

She laughed.

“I should be immensely flattered if I could quite believe it.”

“Well, it is partly true, but it is also true that I had a restless night, and was glad to be out of bed. You look as if you had not slept yourself,” I added, glancing at her. “Your eyes are heavy.”

“Oh yes, I slept very well last night,” she answered, “though, strange to say, I never went to bed.”

“How was that?” I inquired, pricking up my ears.

“Well, I had a bad headache yesterday evening, and papa persuaded me to lie down on the couch in my room and let him ‘charm it away.’ You have no idea how soothing his touch is. He just strokes my forehead and all the pain vanishes directly. In five minutes I was asleep; a deep dreamless sleep from which I did not wake till morning, when I was very much astonished to find myself still on the couch fully dressed.”

“Ah!” I murmured thoughtfully, and was silent so long that she looked at me in surprise.

“I think I have something that belongs to you,” I resumed at last, taking the handkerchief from my pocket.

“Oh yes, that is mine,” she exclaimed; “where did you find it?”

“I found it,” I answered deliberately, watching her face as I spoke, “in our bedroom, last night. How do you suppose it came there?”

She met my eyes without the faintest shadow of consciousness or confusion.

“Probably Lady Rushton took it in mistake for her own.”

“H’m—perhaps so. You never walk in your sleep, I suppose?”

She laughed outright.

“Not that I am aware of. I hope you and Lady Rushton don’t suspect me of prowling about your room at night?”

To that I made no reply, but fell into a brown study again, tracing figures in the gravel with my cane.

She watched me with a flicker of amusement in her eyes.

“I don’t think early rising agrees with you, Sir John,” she observed demurely, after a pause.

“You are right, it does not,” I answered, rousing myself. “I suppose I ought to be as lively as a lark at this virtuous hour, but I find myself as stupid as an owl. I shall make no apology for leaving you—particularly,” I added, glancing down the walk, where Reginald

Dane had just appeared, "as a more entertaining companion will take my place. *Au revoir!*"

Nodding to Reginald as I passed, I returned to the house, in a denser fog of perplexity than ever.

One thing was evident; Elsie was utterly unconscious of her action of the previous night. She had been a victim, not an accomplice; the helpless instrument of another's will.

What unholy spells had Captain Falconer exercised upon his daughter? Had she acted in obedience to "hypnotic suggestion"? That supposition seemed the most probable, in the light of what she had told me, but it still left unaccounted for the most perplexing point of the problem—how she could possibly have entered the room by the window. I puzzled over it till I was thoroughly bewildered, and at last dismissed the subject from my mind with the reflection that time would probably clear up the mystery, which, meanwhile, I resolved to keep strictly to myself.

Some days passed, however, and brought no solution, though they brought forth another event of some interest.

Reginald formally proposed to Captain Falconer for his daughter's hand—and, as I had anticipated, was rejected.

The Captain would condescend to give no explanation of his refusal except the statement that he had "other views" for her. The fact was, I suspect, that he did not see any prospective advantage to himself in the marriage, knowing that, when once it was a *fait accompli*, he would have nothing further to expect from Reginald, who frankly disliked him.

Anyhow, he refused point-blank, totally declining to be "squared." In vain the young man stormed and expostulated: in vain Elsie pleaded and wept. He met tears and anger with the same bland, but immovable determination. He laid no embargo on their intercourse, being fully aware that the girl was too dutiful, and too much afraid of him, to set him at defiance.

So the lovers continued to see each other as usual, but all their happiness was blighted. Elsie fretted openly, and Reginald took to evil courses; that is to say, he drank more than was good for him, and haunted the tables at the Casino when he ought to have been in bed. To compensate for having thwarted him in love, fortune favoured him in play. He won steadily, and on one particular evening, after a longer *séance* than usual, rose from the *trente-et-quarante* table, the richer by some twenty thousand francs.

I was with him at the time, having thought it well, in his present reckless mood, to keep an eye on his proceedings.

He was not in the least elated by his good luck, seeming to care little whether he won or lost. He thrust his pocket-book, which was crammed with notes, into the breast-pocket of his coat, and turned from the table with a yawn.

"My head aches," he said; "let's go and have a soda at the buffet."

But I linked my arm in his, and drew him towards the door. Captain Falconer was hovering near us, and there was a peculiar gleam in that "mesmeric" eye of his which I did not like.

"No more 'sodas' to-night," I said firmly; "you are going straight home to bed, and the first thing to-morrow morning you will deposit that money in the bank."

When we reached the hotel, I followed him upstairs to his room, and saw him throw the pocket-book carelessly into a drawer.

"I'm dead tired," he said, stretching himself; "I shall tumble in at once. Good-night, Sir John."

"Good-night and pleasant dreams," I rejoined; but instead of leaving the room, I locked the door, then proceeded with much deliberation to divest myself of my boots, and stretch myself on a couch which stood in the corner of the room.

Reginald stopped short in the act of removing his coat, and stared at me. "Hallo! what does that mean?" he demanded.

"It means, my dear boy, that I am going to pass the night here, if you have no objection."

"As guardian of the treasure?" he suggested, laughing. "I'm awfully obliged, I'm sure, but it really isn't necessary. The door is locked, and no one can possibly come in through the window."

"No matter. *J'y suis, j'y reste.*"

"All right! But don't lie there, anyhow. Take the bed, and I'll have the couch."

"I'm perfectly comfortable here, thank you," I answered, and tried to think I was; but what human being was ever comfortable on a French hotel "sofa"? However, the inhospitable piece of furniture had one advantage; it offered no temptation to sleep, and, for certain reasons, I was particularly anxious to keep awake to-night.

Reginald insisted on giving me a pillow, then he "tumbled in," and in ten minutes was fast asleep.

According to his usual habit, he had left the window wide open, and the soft, flower-scented air—mild as if the month were June, instead of January—blew in, gently fluttering the curtains. There was no toilette table to obstruct the view, and I caught a glimpse of the sea, above which a pale half-moon was rising.

It was long after midnight. The moon rose, brightening as it rose, and a dread pale ray of light streamed across the floor from the open window. Suddenly, a shadow obscured it, and, looking up, I saw a woman's figure framed in the opening, its outlines darkly relieved against the background of moonlit sky. It was Elsie Falconer!

She stood for a moment in a listening attitude, then stepped into the room. I could see her face distinctly, and saw that it had the same strained and troubled look I had noticed before.

She crossed into the middle of the room, and paused, looking about her, as if hesitating where to begin her search.

Then I stepped noiselessly forward out of the shadow, and con-

fronted her. She showed not the least alarm or surprise at my appearance, regarding me with mild, unspeculative eyes.

"You are looking for Reginald's pocket-book?" I said, in an undertone.

"Yes," she acquiesced quietly, as if it were the most simple and natural errand in the world.

"I will give it you," I answered, turning my back on her as I opened the drawer where Reginald had placed it.

After a moment I handed it to her. It contained, now, nothing but a slip of paper on which I had hastily pencilled a short but pithy note addressed to Captain Falconer.

She took it from me without a word, and turned to go. I followed her to the window, and a glance outside showed me how she had reached it. The solution of the mystery was so simple that I only wondered I had not guessed it before.

I have already said that beneath each of the windows on the second floor was a projecting ledge of sculptured stone. A narrow board about four feet long—evidently the shelf of a cupboard—had been placed between Miss Falconer's window and Reginald's, resting on the ledges, and forming a bridge which connected them.

What if the board slipped? What if she turned giddy at that perilous height? A false step would probably cost her her life, for nothing interposed to break her fall on to the stone-paved terrace beneath.

Involuntarily I made a movement to hold her back, but it was already too late.

Lightly, steadily, without a trace of fear, she stepped across. I saw a hand put forth from the adjoining window to draw her in; the board was instantly removed, the window closed, and all was still.

I listened intently for any sound of voices from the next room, but none reached me. After an interval, however, I heard the door softly open and close, and footsteps passed down the corridor. The Captain had probably read my note, and had retired to his own room to digest it. I smiled sweetly, and the thought of his discomfiture had so soothing an effect on me that, returning to my inhospitable couch, I slept the sleep of the just till morning.

When we assembled at lunch next day, I was scarcely surprised to find that one member of our little party was missing.

Captain Falconer, taking to heart my warning, had incontinently vanished from the scene, leaving behind him some valueless luggage, several unpaid bills—and his daughter.

Elsie never saw her father again. He was heard of from time to time at various haunts of high play, and later, the news came that he had lost his life in a gambling affray at San Francisco.

Long before that event, however, Elsie was Reginald Dane's wife.



THE QUESTION.

DOES all end here,—and will the tangled skein
 Of life be never wound,
 Or woven to a whole of clear design?
 Is vanity the sum of all our days,
 Body and spirit mingling with the ground,
 Never to rise again, to sing or shine?
 Are prayer and aspiration all in vain,
 Good ever lost in evil, joy in pain,
 And are they fools that walk in the old ways
 Looking beyond this life to life Divine?

Does all end here?

Then farewell hope and fear,
 "Live for to-day," for what is worth a tear
 If this life be our bound?

But some, who would not lie,
 Told us in days gone by
 That this our life is as a minstrel tuning
 The jangling strings, rich melody to wake
 In some diviner sphere :—
 The gardener pruning
 An olive wild, some rarer graft to make ;
 A floweret's blooming,
 To fade, and with the Spring new life to take ;
 The worm's entombing
 To float on wings of fire, and flash in light ;
 The unchastened heart's denial
 That humbled, it may soar ;
 The vessel's maiden trial,
 Teaching the unskill'd helmsman how to steer
 Beyond the tempest to a haven bright,
 Where storms shall beat no more.

Believe, adore,

And all shall be made clear.

Then welcome Hope, though Hope should bring a fear,

And Joy, a tear,

And Love should sorrow bring, with all things dear ;

Welcome the op'ning skies

Of Paradise,

And infinite horizons far and near.

By many a symbol sweet—

The quickened breath

Of snowdrops smiling on the frosty earth

To greet the New Year's birth—

By life in death—

By victory in defeat—

All is not ended here !

C. M. GEMMER.







"AM I TO PRESUME, MADAM, THAT I SEE BEFORE ME THE WIDOW OF MY
LATE SON, JOHN ALEXANDER CLARE?"